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The Restinga

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The Restinga

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in Film, Theater and Communication Arts
Creative Writing

by

Valerie Harbolovic

BS Middlesex Hospital School of Physiotherapy, 1976

December, 2011

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Dedication

I dedicate this manuscript to our houseboy, Bernardo.
My parents forbade me to swim in Lobito Bay, but I often went after school with my friends. Bernardo regularly fetched me from class, and I would ride home, dripping-wet, on the handlebars of his bicycle to our house on the Restinga. He would whisk me inside (via the back door) so that I could change my clothes and evade detection.
Before we left Angola, in June of 1962, he asked my father for a radio. My father said no. I have often thought about that and the unimaginable horrors that were to come. Shame on us! This is too little, and much too late ... but there it is.



The Restinga, Lobito, Angola

<http://www.minhaangola.org/#/angola/4530728524>

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Abstract

The Restinga explores dysfunctional sexual relationships in the familiar context of a love triangle, but it is set in the exotic African landscape of pre-war colonial Angola in 1960, where the author spent her childhood. *The Restinga* evolved from a short story presented at a graduate fiction workshop led by Joseph and Amanda Boyden at the University of New Orleans' Madrid campus in the summer of 2007.

Research for this project included:

- Many interviews with the author's parents
- Compilation and review of family home movies made at the time
- Interview with Richard J. Houk, author of the article: "The Hotel Terminus: A Farce without an Ending"
([The Journal of African Travel-Writing, Number 1](#), September 1996 (pp. 42-51))
- Interview with Nancy Henderson-James, author of: "At Home Abroad: An American Girl in Africa"
(<http://nancyhendersonjames.com/>)

The Lover by Marguerite Duras influenced the author in her writing of *The Restinga*.



(Personal photograph of the author)

Southwest Africa, Angola, Lobito, Restinga, Colony, Portugal, Salazar, Revolutionary War, *Guerra Colonial*, *Guerra do Ultramar*, *Guerra da Libertação*, Jonas Savimbi, UNITA

Introduction

I have searched for my dead father my whole life, but I looked in all the wrong places; in the end it was Lalo who restored him to me ... my dear Lalo.

BOOK I (1931-1934)

Daddy

As I descend into sleep and memory, two things always come back to me: his tea green eyes flecked with gold and the fleeting aroma of the sea that clung to him like the fragrance of the evaporating brine blowing in at dusk from the salt flats of Lobito Bay. If I inhale deeply, I can fill my lungs with him. If I wait, his eyes coalesce out of the gloom — translucent jade with glints of sunlight ... and they are smiling — smiling at me.

I look into his dim office. The exposed oak beams span the smoky ceiling and traverse the room. I am small, five, and as I look up, their height and heaviness bear down on me. I see the shadowy pictures of his racing horses on the yellowing wall and a spider's web hanging down from one of the joists in the corner. His desk sits by the window with the chintz curtains. On it, a banker's lamp with its pea green shade and brass trimmings and an inkwell with Daddy's fountain pen next to it. The closed ledgers are placed to one side, and the curtains are drawn. The last embers from the fireplace flicker with a deep, red glow.

When I come here during the day, it is a place of business. My father sits at his desk, and the curtains are open. I can see out to the pond and the ducks, on to the poplar trees, and to the massive oaks of the woods beyond. Most of the day, he is too busy for me to spend time in this room with him. He sits at the desk and writes in his ledgers. This is also the place where he meets the farm manager and some of the tenants. One time I hear him shout at Terence, the manager. He shouts often but never at me. On the day after Christmas, the staff comes into this

room, and he and my mother give them their Christmas boxes. My parents stand side by side; they do not touch, and they do not speak to each other. He is tall and weathered with a thick mane of copper, red hair, and my mother is thin and upright with wisps of pale, blonde hair and a sad, faraway look.

In the early evening, his office becomes my place ... our place. Wearing pajamas and a dressing gown, I knock on the door at half-past seven. It is time for my bedtime story. The door is heavy, and I push it hard with both hands. Daddy sits in the leather chair by the fire wearing his glasses, half moons perched on the bridge of his nose, as he reads a book. He sits with his legs stretched out in front of him and his feet crossed on the thick red and blue Persian carpet. The book has a leather cover that is peeling and the corners are embossed with gold. Peering over the top of his glasses at me, he beckons me forward.

“Sadie, darling,” he says.

On the table by the side of the chair is a brandy snifter, half filled with amber liquid. Logs crackle in the grate, and as I get closer, I feel the heat on my legs. The wood radiates red and white; the fire has been ablaze all day. It is November and it is cold. In the morning, the grass in the paddocks will be white with frost. His books cover the walls, placed in row upon row of stout wooden shelves, from floor to ceiling. He leans forward, takes the poker in his hand, and jostles the logs. All the while with his eyebrows raised, looking at me, with the hint of a smile. The fire hisses and spits and an orange spark shoots out onto the carpet. He jumps up and flicks the red glob onto the wooden floor where he grinds it out with the heel of his slipper. When he sits down, he smiles and extends his arms. “Come to me, my sweet girl,” he says.

I rush to him. He feels all whiskery as he places his lips on my cheek and his beard tickles my ears. I giggle. His cheek tastes salty when I kiss him. I climb up onto his lap and hug

his big belly. His embrace crushes the breath out of me. Seated on his lap and enveloped in his arms, I am safe. I am so safe with him in this place. My mother rarely comes here. After dinner, she goes to the sitting room and reads. Sometimes she listens to slow, sad music on the gramophone or plays the piano. Later she goes to her bedroom, and I do not see her again.

“Read me a story, Daddy.”

He puts his book down and takes another book from the table next to his chair. He looks at me. “I found a good one for us. How about Aesop?”

“Oh Daddy, you’re so silly.”

It is a game. He knows I like Aesop’s Fables. I ask him to read me the story of the hare and the tortoise every time. It is my favorite. I do not run very well. My father tells me that it doesn’t matter how fast I am, what is important is to go the distance.

I settle into his lap and put one arm around his neck. I play with the Saint Christopher’s medal he always wears. His name is Christopher, too; Malcolm Christopher Carnegie - Kit. His initials are written on the back: M.C.C. He pats my shoulder, holds me tighter, and starts the story. I rest my head on his chest and feel the heave of his breathing. The timbre of his voice resonates, like he is reading into a well, and my ear fills with the echo. I sink further into his lap.

When the story is over, my father pats my back and lifts me up to carry me to bed. The heavy oak door whines as its hinges creak open. Daddy’s feet clunk up the thick, carpeted stairs. He climbs slowly, deliberately, and brushes a lock of hair from my face as he takes me up to my bedroom. He opens the door to put me in bed, and I reach for the light switch.

“No, no, sweetheart. It’s time for sleep,” he says.

“Please leave it on, Daddy. I’m afraid by myself.”

“I’ll stay with you.”

He reaches to pull back the bedspread and blankets and then sets me down on the bed. My head flops onto the pillow. The sheet feels cool against the back of my neck, and I shiver a little. My feet are cold against the cotton. He pulls up the thick, heavy covers. The weight of them presses down on me, and my body warms. Seated on the edge of the bed, Daddy strokes my hair. His fingers move in strong sweeps from my forehead back toward the crown of my head. His hands are big, but their touch is light, exquisite. I try to stay awake, but I cannot. My eyelids become heavy, and the room dissolves into darkness.

Snakes

I walk into the woods past the pond and the poplars. I am six, and I know that I should not be there, but I go anyway. There is a patch of grass with bluebells where the sunlight strikes. The indigo of the flowers mixed with the shaft of sun gives the spot a purplish-blue aura, and I turn my head away from the brightness. I find a spot in the shade, lie on my back in the dried grass, and look up at the filigree umbrella of branches and leaves above me, all locked and twisted together. The sun streams down. It travels through the trees giving a mottled light in the penumbra. I close my eyes. The balmy day makes my limbs feel heavy, as if I am drugged.

Through layers of murky sleep, I stir and surface. I hear rustling: the sound of crushed, dried leaves and breaking twigs. The sun is lower in the sky. I rub my eyes, but the golden light still dazzles. I roll over onto my side, shade my face with my hand, and see what it is that disturbed my slumber. I stop. Not two yards from where I lie, two snakes dart and coil. They lift their bodies straight up in the air, wrap themselves around each other, and then collapse to the ground. Each snake jostles for position, rises up, and then pushes down his opponent. I see their dry, scaly skin and the black and cream colored zigzag markings down their backs. Adders! They roll over and over each other, like waves in the roiling surf. They meld together and fall apart. It is not their movement that holds me but their unblinking eyes. They are red with black vertical slits. Briefly, they stare at me and I cannot turn away. I suck in my breath and brace my muscles. They look at me again, but I still cannot move.

I hear the distant percussion of horses' hooves against the dried dirt path through the woods. I see my father and shout, "Dadeeeeeeeee!"

He enters the close and sees the vipers. His horse canters forward but then shies away. My father

gives the horse's flank a crack with his crop, moves forward again and approaches the spot where I am transfixed. Daddy leans over in his saddle and holds his arms out.

“Come on, Sadie,” he says.

“I can't move, Daddy.”

“You have to.”

“Can't ...”

He moves in closer, leans over the side of his horse, and scoops me up like a rag doll. He hugs me close. The dogs bark and rush the adders. The snakes separate and the smaller one slithers into the undergrowth. The larger one turns, ready to strike, and the dogs hesitate. They run to my father when he calls them back — all but old Rex, a Basset hound, who noses the snake and tries to lick it. I hear a yowl and Rex retreats. I think the adder has bitten him because he limps away. When I look again, I see only the reptile's tail as it slips into the brush.

I cling to my father as we walk the horse out of the close.

“I shall always keep you safe,” he says, his voice breaking up.

My hands and clothes are caked with mud, snot, and grass stains. Rex does not come home that night. The next day, one of the farm hands finds him swollen and cold in a hollowed out tree trunk at the edge of the woods.

Purple Bougainvillea

I am seven years old when my mother leaves us, and my father decides to sell and move away. I cry myself to sleep at night when I think of my broken family and my lost home. Is it because of me that my parents are so sad and angry?

Down by the pond and the woods, I touch the tree where Rex was found and take a piece of its bark. I pick up a duck feather from the edge of the pond and fill my pockets with acorns from the floor of the woods. I stash them in an old tin chocolate box along with a photograph of my mother. I do not yet know that we are to go to Africa.

On the day my mother departs, I watch from upstairs with our housekeeper. My father has told me to stay in my room.

“I want to say goodbye to her,” I shout at him.

“You stay up there or you’ll get a bloody thrashing. Right now, young lady. Right bloody now.”

I climb up the stairs, and when he is out of earshot, I say, “Bloody bugger, bugger ... bugger off, why don’t you!”

The front door slams followed by the crunch of footsteps on the gravel driveway below. I part the lace curtains and look out. A tall man loads suitcases into the back of a pale yellow motorcar. He wears a long coat and a hat. I cannot see his face under the brim of his fedora. My mother stands by and watches. When he is done, he puts his arm around her shoulders. She stoops a little as she walks to the car. He opens the door for her, and before she gets in, she turns and looks up at the window where I stand. I step back from the lace curtains so she cannot see me. I peep out one more time and see her wave. That long, slow wave is my last memory of my

mother. I am unable to watch her drive away. In Africa, my father tells me she has a new family, a husband and a baby boy, both called Hugh.

After she leaves, we have a visit from my father's family. I do not believe that they have stayed with us before. Dad tells me they came to see me when I was a baby. Downstairs, the house is cold and empty. There are no curtains in the windows, and most of our belongings are sold or in storage. The fireplaces are unlit, and the bare halls echo. We live upstairs which is still furnished, and our manager, Terence, will stay on until the new owners arrive.

The visitors invite me to call them Granny and Aunt Tess. On their second night, after I have gone to bed, I hear a ruckus and tiptoe down the hall to listen at the closed door. Through the heavy wood, I hear muffled sounds and raised voices. Someone is crying, and it sounds like Aunt Tess. I recognize my grandmother's voice as she shouts at my father.

"For the love of God, Kit, stop and think of the child. It's all very well for you, but don't take Sadie. What's the matter with you?"

"I'll do as I bloody well please. Don't concern yourselves. You never have before."

"You know we couldn't come here, not while that woman was here, anyway."

"So now you come here, now that she's gone? Thanks for your support ... too little and too late."

"We want to help. Please, let us. You and Sadie," says Aunt Tess.

"Help, my arse. Interfere, more like it, Tess. You always bloody did."

"Maybe we need to leave?" my grandmother says.

"Yes, why don't you? Sod off!"

Barely back to my bedroom, the door slams. I hear my father's heavy footsteps on the wooden floor outside followed by the crash of the front door. The smell of cigarette smoke wafts

up from the garden. I look out of my window and see his shadow move down the path and sit on the bench. He whistles softly under his breath. I know he is angry.

Later, as I go to sleep, I worry he may not take me with him. My grandmother and aunt depart early the next morning, and I do not see them to say goodbye. Dad tells me we are going to Angola, a Portuguese colony in Southwest Africa.

“Great business opportunity, Sadie, chance to be very wealthy. I’m going to take people out into the bush — hunting elephants and leopards. So, what do you think about that?”

I nod my head. I want to go. I want to be with him.

We travel by ship to Lobito. Dad and I sit at the captain’s table every night for dinner. I like the way Dad pulls the chair back for me to sit down like he did for my mother. It takes several weeks to get to our destination, and we stop off on the way: The Canaries, Madeira, Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé, the Equator, and finally we arrive in Lobito. Dad and I go up on deck and lean over the guardrails. The day is cool and I wear a cardigan. A stiff breeze moves puffball clouds across the azure sky and whips up white, foamy peaks on the slate-grey waves of the South Atlantic. I push my hair back from my face. As we enter the narrow opening into Lobito Bay and leave the ocean, a pilot in white tropical uniform pulls up in a small motorboat and boards the ship. His job is to guide us into the port of Lobito. We sail between the mainland and a narrow peninsula called the Restinga. Dad tells me it is where all the foreigners in Lobito live. The hills of the mainland look dry and are the color of raw umber. A factory near the shoreline belches out dirty, white smoke into the air. I see a few houses near the factory, all clustered together. On the other side of the Bay, the Restinga is covered with a mist. Here and there, palm trees and terracotta rooftops puncture the cover. Dad tells me it’s because of the dry season. The

mist is called the *cacimbo*, and it will burn off by midmorning.

When we land at the quay, the crew gives us streamers to throw overboard at the waiting crowd below. *Serpentinas*: ribbons of brightly colored paper, tightly wound into reels of magenta, yellow, cobalt blue, lavender, and emerald green. Before we alight, Dad spots his partner and points him out to me.

“There he is. See him?”

James Maxwell meets us at the quay at the bottom of the gangway.

“Call me Maxie,” he says, “everybody does.”

He extends his hand to me, and I shake it. His grasp is strong. I clench my fingers and thumb tight in response.

“You’ve got a firm grasp, I like that. It shows character. What is your name, young lady?”

“My name is Sadie. Sadie Carnegie.”

“That’s a fine Scottish name, Sadie,” he says. “I’m very pleased to meet you.”

He is not a tall man, but he walks at a brisk pace, his body taut with energy. His hair is blonde and he wears sunglasses and a straw hat. His trousers and shirt are light and loose fitting. He does not wear a tie. He talks Portuguese to the porters who are going to take our luggage to the train station nearby, to the hub of the *Caminho de Ferro de Benguela*, the Benguela Railway. Maxie calls it the CFB. He moves his hands as he talks and throws back his head in laughter. He squeezes my shoulder and smiles at me. They load our suitcases onto a trolley and wheel them away. I like this new stranger in our life. He takes us to the Hotel Terminus for lunch. A chubby waiter called Fernando serves us. Maxie orders in Portuguese. It is a pretty language, especially the way many words end in a “shush”, like a lullaby to rock a baby to sleep.

We catch the overnight train to Huambo Province later that afternoon and get off the next morning at Nova Lisboa, the provincial capital. We climb into Maxie's old truck and load our suitcases in the back. We have a six-hour drive ahead.

The land is dry, yellowish-brown. The truck leaves a trail of ochre dust in its wake as we travel eastwards on the dirt road. We pass through villages, groups of square mud huts with thatch roofs. Women with their babies tied to their backs walk along the roadside with enormous baskets on their heads. When the engine overheats, we stop. Dad and Maxie sit under a baobab tree; its suspended fruit look like dead, hanging rats. I walk down to a stream and watch young African girls in vivid dresses wash clothes in the river and lay them out to dry on rocks and bushes. Small, naked children run out to the dirt road and wave at us. I am hot and dusty when we finally arrive at our new home.

The main house is a two-story structure of wood and stone with a terracotta roof and a verandah on all four sides. A large garden surrounds the house. There is a myriad of potted plants on the verandah. The plants and trees look different in Angola: banana trees with hanging chandeliers of fruit, crotons, hibiscus, smoky-blue jacarandas with delicate leaves, coconut palms, and bougainvillea. Flame-red acacia trees line the semicircular driveway that leads up to the front door of the lodge. Dad runs the estate with Maxie, and they take parties out into the bush. The tourists come to hunt wild game.

It does not take me long to feel at home. There is a school that I go to with the other estate children. Soon I am better at Portuguese than I am at English. I even know some words in *Imbundu* that Bernardo, our houseboy, has taught me — *Gingumba* (peanut) and *ovava* (water). Dad calls me his little native. Apart from the big house and the schoolhouse, there are outlying

buildings where the servants and workers live — huts — each with a garden that the occupants cultivate and washing lines out back filled with drying clothes.

Bernardo is the exception. He lives with us. His small apartment is attached to the main house. That way there is someone there when Dad and Maxie are gone. I sleep under my mosquito net and hear the sound of the overhead fan whirring along with the pulse of African drums beating in the native village. Every morning I know to shake out my shoes because scorpions may have hidden in them over night.

One day, Dad and I go walking, and he lifts up the edge of a stone to reveal a black scorpion underneath. It is the size of my palm and scuttles back into the shade. When Dad prods it with his walking stick, it extends its pincers forwards and raises its tail with the stinger ready to strike. Dad lifts the stone up a little more, and it darts back further and burrows away from the sun.

“Steer clear of those little buggers, Sadie.”

“I’m not afraid.”

“Do as you’re told, young lady.”

I like to wander and explore on my own. I set out on a trail through the burnished landscape, away from the homestead and past the workers’ huts. I do not need to tell Bernardo where I am; he just seems to know, and when it is time, he finds me. I see a mass of heliotrope on a hill in the distance along a line of bluffs. It piques my curiosity. It is nearly Christmas, and we are on vacation. I walk along a dusty path. On a cliff-side, there is a burst of color, an eruption of purple bougainvillea that seems to spew out of the rock face. I fix my sights on it and walk towards it. I have a pair of binoculars around my neck. Two of the compound dogs

accompany me. Their coats are a mustard yellow, like the dried dirt all around that rises up in the air to form a cloud when a car winds its way down the tracks to the house. After an hour or so, they slink away into the brush.

I raise the binoculars to my eyes and see that amid the clusters of purple flowers there are pieces of wood visible; long planks, worn, old timbers recessed into the vine. A hidden house? I look for a way to climb up to the ledge and spot a path. The trail is stony, narrow, and winds up the side of the escarpment. A small waterfall glimmers in the sun next to it. Using the long grasses and desiccated vines, I clamber up. I lean forward, slither on some loose rocks, and fall onto my knee. I yowl with pain. In my pocket, I find a handkerchief and wrap it around my bloody knee. The bloodstains on my lower leg dry into dark, coagulated cords. Some of the blood drips onto my white socks and Clark sandals. I stand up and try to put weight on my leg. It hurts. One of the compound dogs reappears on the cliff top above me and barks. I zigzag upwards. Prickly bougainvillea vines seem to be growing out of all the apertures. Doors and windows are overgrown. The house has deteriorated for a long time, I think, and I wonder who would want to have a house up here? The house is invisible until right on top of it.

I find a small side entrance that is not clogged and go in. It is dark inside, and it takes a few minutes for my eyes to adjust to the dim light. My fingers move along the wall toward the window. The house smells dusty and old. There is a table in the center of the room, and a stream of light from the window illuminates it. A chair is placed next to it, and a partially melted candle on a saucer stands in the middle. I make my way over to the table; it is sticky and gritty as I pass my hand over it. Cobwebs hang from the ceiling and touch my face with a ghostly caress. The walls are gloomy and drab. The house is very small; it all seems to be contained in the single room. To one side stands an ancient cooker with doors to the oven in front and rusted burners on

top. Next to it is a stand-alone cabinet with mesh in the doors to keep mice out, just like the ones at the lodge. There is an old flour bag inside it. On the stove stands an old-fashioned iron with a hole on top to load hot coals into.

In the gloom, I spot a doorway at the back of the room. It hangs sideways on one hinge, the doorknob rough and corroded. I try to push the door aside but cannot. I try to pull it into the room, and it falls off its solitary hinge. I set the door down, prop it against the wall, and walk through the portal. There is a stairway behind. I test the lowest step by applying pressure with my forefoot. It holds. I proceed up the stairwell. I cannot see much and feel the wall with my hands and the stairs with my feet. My progress is slow. I hear a noise above me, like an animal scuttling around. It may be a bird or a mouse, but I am not afraid. I move slowly up each step, feeling my way. There is a slight ledge in the wall which serves as a handrail, and I use it to guide myself up.

I reach the top of the stairs and arrive at a landing. The landing is more like a small room. A thin mattress in the corner is old and stained. A tattered mosquito net suspended from the roof hangs over it. The net is ripped and shredded. There is a strong smell of mold: mold and something else ... the barest trace of chicken fat. I feel the back walls which must be cut out of the cliff itself, and they are moist. Now I understand how the bougainvillea grows. A spring feeds it. It also accounts for why the house smells fetid and damp.

Bernardo calls my name in the distance. The dogs bark. I descend the stairs past the table and chair at the lower level and out the side door. The vine scratches my forearm as I walk under it to get back to the trail. I scamper down the pathway and race toward the sound of his voice. He runs towards me from the direction of the lodge and waves. His eyes focus on my cut forearm, bandaged knee, stained socks, and shoes.

“What happened to you, Miss Sadie?” he asks.

“I went for a walk with the dogs and forgot the time.”

“This is not a good place for you to come alone. Next time you tell me, and I will come with you.”

“I’m not a child, Bernardo.”

“Of course not, Miss Sadie,” he says and bows.

I do not reply. I walk past him and set out on the trail toward the homestead. It is nearly dusk, and I am hungry for dinner.

Tryst

I return often to the hidden house. It is my secret place, but there are signs others come here. Sometimes the chair is in a different place; once the mattress was pulled out from the wall. The cobwebs hang down from the ceiling and brush against my face. When I perch on the chair, it creaks. I sit up at the table in the light and open my tin chocolate box which contains the bark, feather, acorns, and photograph of my mother. I run my finger around her image. Her face is beautiful, but it looks so sad. I miss her. I do not understand why she left us. I wish I had known her better, but she did not allow it. We were not close.

When I am here and it rains, I like to look out over the plain below. The waterfall fills up and makes a rushing noise as it shoots down the hillside. During the dry season the flow ceases. Sometimes the dogs from the compound follow me. They do not stay long. They wander around the surrounding area and then regroup when I leave, when it is time to return home.

Dad is often gone. Large groups of travelers gather at the house and remain for a few days while he gathers camp supplies. Then my father, or Maxie, or both leave with the group and are gone for a week to ten days. The house changes from cacophonous, with laughter ringing out late at night, to silent. All the while, I go to school, do my lessons, and then I roam as I please.

When Dad is away our housekeeper, Ana, and her daughter, Ana Amélia, make meals for me. Bernardo and I eat together at the table. Ana does not allow me in the kitchen. When I try to go in, she shouts, pulls out a huge knife from the kitchen drawer, and brandishes it over her head.

“Corta cabeça.” (“I’ll chop your head off.”)

“I can come in if I want to.”

“Stay out if you’re smart, or I’ll put a spell on you.” She follows me into the hallway and

clucks like a chicken.

I hate our housekeeper. When I am with Bernardo, Ana leaves me alone. I am glad because she frightens me. I stay away from the kitchen and help Bernardo care for two orphaned leopard cubs that are in transit to a zoo in Catumbela. One of the hunters shot their mother. Dad brought them to the house, and we will keep them until they can travel. They are about three months old, Bernardo thinks. They have faint smudges of spots on their smoky grey fur. I play with them every day. Their rough tongues lick my hand and feel like sandpaper. When they were little, Bernardo brought them to his apartment and allowed them to sleep on his camp bed with him to keep them warm. Now that they are bigger, they have an area on the verandah where they live. We still bring them indoors to feed them. Their paws are large and slap the floor as they walk. They sneak up and pounce on each other. Bernardo and I catch mice, frogs, and grasshoppers for them. Soon they will be too big to stay with us. Then they will travel to Catumbela Zoo on the coast.

Our school breaks at two o'clock, and everyone goes home for a siesta. This is the time I like to ramble, during the silence. It is tremblingly hot as I walk down the familiar path to the hidden house, past the workers' shacks and into the bush. The air shimmers with the heat and warps the horizon. There is no wind, and I sweat in the mid-afternoon heat. The cicadas in the trees shrill out their chorus; a lone vulture circles and soars overhead. The few trees that grow here are stunted and bare. The dust penetrates everything. I look at my socks and shoes. They are coated with a yellowish tinge. The grasses are dry, and when I walk, they crunch underfoot. The vines are brittle. They snap and crumble in my fingers. The sky overhead is indigo blue, and the sun beats down without a cloud in the sky to break the afternoon heat. The smell of a decaying animal permeates the air. Near a termite hill, I pass a dead antelope with its white bones exposed

through its taut, rotting skin.

Up the stone path to the house, the blooms of bougainvillea contrast against the dun color of the landscape. The waterfall is gone, only a trickle where it once was. I know that when the rainy season starts, it will return.

As I ascend the final leg of the trail, and before I reach the platform, I hear something that is out of place. It sounds like a wounded animal crying out. I stop and listen. I hear the sound again; a cry of pain — loud, shrill, commanding attention. I hasten up the path; curious what the noise might be. Then I hear a different sound, a much deeper cry — a bellow. My hands are sweaty, and I rub them against my dress to dry. I approach the house slowly and silently. I hear a shout from within. The cries are human. The house is cool and dark as I enter. I feel along the wall and move toward the light of the window. There are people upstairs. I go up.

At the top, two people lie on the mattress: two naked bodies, one black and the other white. The first thing I notice is the Saint Christopher medallion around the man's neck. The white person is my father, and the black woman is Ana's daughter, Ana Amélia. As she lies on her back, her face contorts. My father lays over her with his eyes closed and his face and back sweating. They do not see me. As he attacks her, he frowns and breathes heavily, like a snorting horse, but she does not seem afraid or hurt. They move together, one upon the other. Her legs are wrapped around his waist: her black torso a dark shadow under his white one. They move faster, then slower, and then faster again, each time a little quicker. I understand. I have seen animals doing this: dogs, cattle, horses.

Softly, I walk back around the corner to the stairwell. I descend with great care. I put one foot below the other. My father is not often angry with me, but I have seen his temper. I remember the times in England when he shouted at our manager, Terence. He often shouts at the

workers here. I saw him flog one of them — a thief. As I leave the house, I notice the noise has stopped. They are finished. I have never seen my father naked before. My stomach muscles tighten, and I feel the grip of spasm in my gut. I know I am going to be sick. I dry heave and wretch, but I am not able to vomit. I wait until it passes, dash home along the path, and climb into my bed. I wait for siesta time to be over so that I can return to school.

Flames

A group of the older children at school sit in a corner and whisper. I do not hear what they say. They laugh loudly. Later, I tell Bernardo, and he looks at me in a strange way with his head tilted to one side and his eyebrows raised in a question.

“What does it mean?” I ask.

He shakes his head.

“Don’t you know?”

He looks at me but says nothing.

“You do so know. Tell me. Tell me.”

“It is not for me to tell, Miss Sadie.”

As I leave his apartment, I clip one of his small, wooden spirit dancers, *Ovinganji*. It falls to the floor and shatters. I do not stop to pick it up. The next time, I hear what the students say. They say that Ana’s daughter, Ana Amélia, is going to have a baby. That evening when she is not looking at me, I peek at her belly. I see the swell, despite her heavy sweater, as she turns to leave the room. It is true.

“Did you know that Ana Amélia is going to have a baby?” I ask Bernardo.

“This is not something you should know about, Miss Sadie.”

“Why not? I am nearly eight.”

“These are bad things.”

“Why?”

Bernardo does not respond. He shakes his head again as he leaves the room.

“Why?” I shout after him.

During the night, I hear a long, low cry like an animal in distress — one solitary howl. The next morning everyone at school is talking. Ana's daughter is dead. She died during the night trying to give birth to her baby. Only her mother attended her during the labor, no one else. Ana sent the other women away. The drums shriek the night Ana Amélia is buried. Dad and Maxie are gone, and I stay in the apartment with Bernardo.

I see my secret house burn. My purple bougainvillea house burns. I watch Ana from behind the creepers as she climbs the path. She wears a long white gown which makes her skin look ebony-black. A long streamer flows down her back from the white turban on her head. The kids at school say she has gone mad with grief. She holds a can in her hand as she climbs up the scarp. Even from my hiding place I can smell it: Petrol. I race upstairs and watch as she pours the contents of the can on the floors and walls. I hear her sob. I know why she cries. Her daughter is dead — Ana Amélia — the daughter that I saw with my father in this place. Her baby was too big, they say, and she died. Ana's wail is terrible: the sound of an animal damaged beyond repair. I know she loved this daughter who died. She was her favorite child, and both her sons are long gone to Luanda, the capital. She is alone now — all alone.

Ana lights a match and drops it on the floor. I must move to a safe place. I will be burned if I do not get out. As the flames spread, I clamber onto the roof and pull myself up to the cliff top. I hide behind a rock. I watch her race out of the side door and down the path, screaming. She stops and turns as the house burns. Slowly, she twirls around and around. Her white dress fans out with the motion, and her turban tail trails behind her in the sinuous curve of a streamer, like a *serpentina*.

“Ayeeeeeee,” she screams.

My father’s Saint Christopher medallion goes missing at the time Ana disappears. I hear she has gone back to her village, broken by despair.

Decline

I am eight when Ana leaves our compound during the night. I am sorry that her daughter died, but I am glad she is gone. Bernardo and I look all over the house for Dad's Saint Christopher, but we do not find it. We get a new housekeeper. She allows me into the kitchen. It is after Ana Amélia's death that my father begins to change. I notice that he looks thinner. His face is gaunt and his eyes have a glassy look. His thick red hair turns thin and grey. It falls out in handfuls. He lies in bed, day after day, and neither eats nor gets up. The few guests we have go out into the bush with Maxie. My father is too ill to join them on safari.

I go into his bedroom and draw the curtains. He turns his head away from the sunlight and from me. He holds his hands over his eyes.

"Close the curtains, for Christ's sake, you're going to blind me."

I close the curtains and sit on the edge of the bed. He turns and looks at me, and I raise my eyebrows in question.

"Are you feeling any better, Dad?" I ask.

He shakes his head. His skin has a yellow tinge in the sunlight. I do not know what it means. Bernardo sleeps outside the door of my father's room at night. Maxie sends for the doctor from Nova Lisboa.

"I wish you would eat something," I say and look at his untouched breakfast tray.

"The thought makes me sick, Sadie."

"How about a little fruit?"

"No, Sadie. I can't ..."

"Please Dad."

He does not eat.

Dr. Amaral is a dark, hirsute man with very proper manners. He opens the door for me, and when I enter the room, he stands up and nods his head. When he arrives from Nova Lisboa, I lead him upstairs to Dad. He opens his leather medical bag. The air in the bedroom smells stale. Dad lies on his pillows, asleep. His eyes are sunken deep in his sockets. The doctor asks me to leave the room as he goes over to Dad.

I leave the room and stand outside the door. I hear the faint mumble of Dad's deep voice. It is very weak. I cannot hear what is being said. I wait outside for a long time. Bernardo joins me. We sit on the little bench opposite the door to my father's bedroom and wait for the doctor to emerge. The grandfather clock chimes in the hall downstairs. The doctor emerges with a stern face. I look at him. He frowns, shakes his head as he sits down beside me and pats my hand. He smells of cologne. With his soft hand on mine, he looks me in the eyes. His grasp is loose and floppy, like a woman's. His eyes are brown and watery. The stethoscope still hangs around his neck.

"Miss Sadie," he says, "we must move him immediately. We cannot treat him here."

Dr. Amaral is not sure what the problem is, and he recommends that Dad return to England. I try to be strong and grit my teeth, but it is too much. My body shakes with tears; the doctor puts his arm around me and rocks me. I am afraid for my father. Bernardo packs the suitcases. The doctor accompanies us on the train to Lobito. I worry that it will be too much for my father. He is so frail. Not like the robust man who came to Angola two years before. We leave in a rush, and I do not say goodbye to Bernardo. I wonder when we will come back. Maxie takes us to the station. We settle into our railway carriage, and my father rests his head on a

pillow. His head is in my lap. The British consul meets us at the railway station in Lobito. He has contacted Aunt Tess, who will await us at Southampton when we dock. We board our ship.

On a cold November day, we return to England. Aunt Tess greets us at the dock. On the voyage, Dad has eaten a little better, and the captain of the ship has the cook prepare tasty meals to encourage him to eat. His skin is no longer yellow, and his eyes no longer sunken. He sits out on deck every day, wrapped up in blankets. I dare to hope for the future. The ship doctor checks on him daily. When we disembark, my beloved father is taken in a wheelchair straight into a waiting ambulance.

Death and Burial

In December, as the pipes freeze and lakes become skating ponds, my father dies. I am just shy of my tenth birthday. The doctors in England cannot help him. I sit at his side by day and sleep on a little cot in the corner of his room by night. Aunt Tess visits every day. She has never married and has no other nieces or nephews. I am a puzzle to her.

“I can contact your mother if you like, Sadie?”

“No, thank you.”

“Don’t you want to see her?”

“She never came before. Why should she come now?” I ask.

Aunt Tess shakes her head, “I don’t understand you at all.”

My father’s casket looks so solitary standing at the front of the church. Aunt Tess and I are the only people at the funeral. I stand next to her, but I do not hold her hand. She does not like to be touched. How is it possible that my father and his sister could be so different? On top of the casket there is a small posy of white lilies from me. The Norman church smells musty and old. After the service, we trail outside to where a grave has been dug. I hate the thought of my father in a cold dark tomb. He was all about living, not death, and I long for his laugh, his hug, his kiss on my cheek. Tears stream down my face. After today, I will never see him again on this Earth.

Two men, gravediggers, use ropes to lower the coffin. The vicar throws a handful of dirt onto it. It makes a dull clunk as it hits the wood. Aunt Tess pushes me forward. I pick up a handful of earth and throw it onto his casket. I take my glove off to pick up the soil. It is so cold

in my hand. I do not want my father in this frigid place.

I wondered if my mother would come. It might be difficult to recognize her; it has been such a long time since I last saw her. We have not seen each other in three years, since I was seven. I have a half brother and a stepfather. I suppose Aunt Tess contacted my mother after all. I thought she did not come because I did not want to see her. I laugh out loud. Apparently, she did not wish to see me either. For the first time, I realize I am quite alone — an orphan.

I walk away. The two workers shovel earth into the hole. I can no longer see the casket. He is gone. While I could still see his coffin, there might be a chance that he could come back to me. Once it disappears, I know there is no possibility. I move back toward the grave. I want to pull all the soil off his casket, stop the process of internment, have a brief time with him, and look on his face again. Surely they will give me time. I race over to where the workers are. I need time.

“You’ve got to stop,” I shout. “You’ve got to stop. Don’t you see, he can never come back if you don’t stop.”

“Sadie,” screams Tess, and runs over toward me.

“Get her, Declan,” says one gravedigger.

I feel an arm under my knees and another around my neck and back. The worker upends me and carries me in his arms toward Aunt Tess. I kick and beat him, but he does not let go. He carries me over to the waiting car.

“Will you be still if I let you down?” he asks.

I nod and wipe my nose with my forearm.

“I only wanted time, but there is no more time.” I shake my head.

Aunt Tess and I walk toward the car. I bend over and pick up a stone from the ground. I

want to put it in my tin chocolate box with my other things, something tangible and real that confirms I was once in this place and that my dead father once lived. The car is a Bentley, black with darkened windows. We sit down in the back of the car, and the driver, in his peaked hat, turns around to my aunt who makes a waving motion as if to indicate that we are ready to leave. We drive for a while before my aunt speaks. She sits formally, very straight and upright. She turns and looks at me.

“I don’t know what my brother told you about me,” she says. “I decided a very long time ago that marriage and a family life were not for me. I could have married several times, but I chose not to. Just didn’t seem to be the family sort of person. Now your care has fallen into my hands. My responsibility. I have given a great deal of thought about what to do. Your mother’s not in the picture, and frankly, I am not the person to take care of a young girl. Can’t do it. So, I have enrolled you in an all girls’ boarding school. I shall come and visit you during term time, and we shall spend the occasional exeat together. However, during the holidays you will stay at school. I have spoken to the headmistress about it. She is in agreement.”

She pauses for a minute and scrutinizes me in a detached manner.

“So ... what do you think?”

I look at her, and I am unable to respond.

BOOK II (1960-1961)

Siesta

The mist of the *cacimbo* has burned off in the midmorning sun. Light streams in through the bathroom window, and over the road, the waves of the South Atlantic crash. It is near the end of siesta time at our house on the Restinga. Patricia, our Belgian nanny, has put the children, Kit, Sarah, and Emmy, down for their nap, and they should awaken shortly. I listen for the sound of my husband, Paul's, car on the driveway. He is very late. We are to attend a function this evening.

Paul's magazines lie on the vanity in front of me; his filthy little secret. I thumb through the pages. Women, in various stages of undress, smile lasciviously at the camera — posed with their legs splayed apart and their nipples pert and shiny. Tarts. I gather the magazines up and put them back in his bottom drawer. I lock the drawer and replace the key. Paul keeps it in the inside pocket of one of his suits in the closet.

I return to the bathroom and look at myself in the mirror. The features of my mother stare back at me as I sit on the vanity stool in my petticoat. I scrutinize my face and brush my pale blonde hair with the clear-handled aquamarine hairbrush. That particular blue is a favorite; it is like the blue of my eyes. The perfume bottle is set to one side of the vanity, and I hum under my breath as I reach for it. I put the brush down and dab Chanel N° 5 behind my ears and on the insides of my wrists. I close my eyes and inhale. When I stand up and smooth the front of my petticoat, I run my hands over my flat stomach. My touch lingers over my breasts. The nipples harden under my fingers. The perfume fills the air with its musky floral bouquet. I place a final

dab on my neck and cleavage. I smile at my reflection. Paul hates Chanel.

I remember how we met, Paul and I, on one of Aunt Tess's rare visits to boarding school. She brought along a relation who was visiting. A cousin of Tess's and my father's: Paul. I am thirteen, and he is thirty-three, a confirmed bachelor, so Aunt Tess says. When they enter the front hall at school to collect me, I think there is a mistake. He looks so much like my father. For a minute I am silent. She sees my amazement and pats my arm.

“He does look like Kit, doesn't he?”

I nod in disbelief. I lean forward to kiss my aunt on the cheek. I smell the perfume she is wearing. It is strong, like after-shave, and gives me a headache. At a quick glance, he could be my father as a young man, a diluted version. He has the same profile and the same thick mane of hair that my father had before he got sick. As I look at him, though, I see differences. My father was a six-footer. Before he went grey, Dad's hair was copper red, but Paul's is different, lighter. It has a blonde tinge to it, washed-out. He has a thin upper lip. He shakes my hand. His grasp is light, and his skin feels dried out.

“Paul Winter,” he says, “we are second or third cousins, I believe.”

Tess nods.

“You look like my father,” I say.

I am not impressed. My world is entirely female, and I am not used to men, especially a man who is half a generation older than I am. The whispers on the stairwell cause me to look up. I see heads hanging over the top of the banister to have a good look. I see smiles and hear giggles, and then the heads disappear.

We eat lunch at a country pub, and I return to school. I think no more about my remote

cousin, but Paul does think about me. Tess tells me on another occasion that he thinks me pretty. “Very fetching” were his exact words. I wonder if anything could have prepared me for what was to come. I was vulnerable and naïve — an orphan. I was on my own more completely than I realized that day. How I wished my father had lived. How different things might have been for me, but how was I to know?

I stand up and walk into my bedroom to the closet. I lift three dresses out and place them next to each other on the bed: the red, the pale green, and the black. I have to be careful which one I choose. The cocktail party is to welcome the evacuees who fled the bloodbath in the Belgian Congo— those lucky ones who got out after the fall of Lumumba, the first African Prime Minister, following independence from Belgium. The reception is to be held at the home of the Belgian Consul, our friends, Nicol and Lulu Le Compte. My outfit needs to be circumspect, subdued. Paul says the need to flee was so desperate, that one of the men left with his wife, kids, and mistress in the same car. I study the three dresses. I have not decided. This evening I will meet a colleague of Paul’s that he has spoken about often. He and Paul both work for the railway, and his name is Eduardo Gonzales. I am curious.

Paul says, “He’s a bit of a lady’s man, darling. Watch out.”

“I’m safe,” I say. “I’m sure he won’t notice an old married woman like me.”

I hear the car in the driveway. I look out of the bathroom window. The Lancia is there. Paul sounds the horn and shuts the engine off. As he gets out of the driver’s side, I look down on the top of his head. His hair is thinning, and I can see his scalp. I wish he would not use Brylcreem. He is nearly fifty. Our age difference does matter these days. I am thirty, and we have young children, Kit, Sarah, and Emmy; aged nine, four and two.

Our houseboy, Bernardo, emerges from the kitchen— the same Bernardo from Huambo Province. He showed up at the gate looking for work after Maxie told him I had returned to Angola and was living in Lobito.

“Park it,” Paul says and tosses him the keys.

Bernardo nods assent.

“Is Mrs. Winter in the house?” he asks.

Bernardo nods again.

“What was that? I didn’t quite hear you.”

“Yes, sir. Upstairs, sir.”

Bernardo follows Paul with his eyes as he walks into the house. Then he parks the car and pulls the garage door down with a loud thud.

I move away from the window and lower the blinds. I wrap my long silk dressing gown around me, slip my feet into my sandals, and go downstairs to the living room to Paul. It is always this way. Expected. Paul is wearing the dark blue and white striped shirt. It is unbuttoned at the neck, and his tie is thrown down carelessly on the chair. He stands in the corner of the room and pours himself a whisky into a crystal glass. As I enter, he turns.

“You’re late,” I say.

“Drink, darling?” he asks.

I nod and walk out onto the patio.

The sun is low in the sky. This is the hour that I like to sit on the front balcony and look out over the Atlantic as the sun dips down below the horizon. The waves thud and implode against the upright poles which serve as a breakwater. I look past them toward the horizon to wait for the green flash. It is because we live in the tropics, Paul explains. It has to do with the

angle of the rays of light through the atmosphere. I like to sit, and watch, and wait.

At this time, the nanny takes the girls for their evening walk to the park at the end of the Restinga. They call out to me as they leave; Kit is going too. I watch their blond heads as they bob and weave along the sidewalk. They crisscross in front of Patricia. Sarah and Emmy move like little butterflies. I remember when I nursed them as babies, how they nuzzled and pulled at my breast. How greedy they were. They disappear down the road. When they return it will be dark, and we shall be gone. I look at my watch. We are scheduled to attend the reception at eight o'clock.

Paul joins me on the patio and brings me a drink. We clink glasses. He looks at me intently, but I lower my head to avoid his gaze. A pack of cigarettes lies on the cane table, and I take one out. Paul pulls a lighter out of his trouser pocket and clicks it into flame. He places his hand on mine as I raise the cigarette to my lips. I loosen my fingers from his grip. He retains his grasp, and I shiver at his dry touch, like lizard skin. His clumsy effort at intimacy is a precursor to sex. I know this because it is his pattern.

I glance at my watch. Half-past six. My eyes glaze over as I look out to sea. The sun dips down below the horizon, and a flash of emerald green spirals upwards. I return my gaze to Paul. He raises his eyebrows in question.

“Is there time?” he asks.

I shrug my shoulders and look back out to the horizon. I sigh. I will need to get ready for the reception a second time. I clench my fingers around the drink, and the glass shatters. I put down the broken base on the cane table and ring the bell for Bernardo. Paul fusses as he picks up the small pieces of glass from the floor.

“Alright darling? What was all that about?”

I shake my head and shrug my shoulders.

“Nothing, Paul ... absolutely nothing.”

I decide I will wear the black dress this evening — black as in funerals. I take his hand and lead him upstairs.

Reception

We leave the car on the side street by the house of the Belgian Consul. The home of Lulu and Nicol Le Compte is a large white villa brimming with plants. The Belgian flag flies over the front entrance. The interior mirrors the external façade, white throughout: white walls, white furniture, white carpets. White decorated with a fusion of metal and glass. The Le Comptes own four Persian cats and have no children. Some of the bitchier expatriates call Lulu “Madame la Contesse” behind her back.

Paul opens the car door for me. I swing my legs out, and he takes my hand. The evening is warm with a light wind blowing off Lobito Bay. My black dress is sleeveless, but I do not need a wrap. I carry a white bag to go with my pearls and sandals. The waves, lapping up onto the beach of Lobito Bay, make soft sounds in the darkness, like whispers. The street is lined with parked cars. Paper lanterns light up the garden and the pathway to the front door. Clusters of crystalline lights are strung in the palm trees illuminating the fronds above. Pots of white hibiscus stand at the doorway. Music comes from a gramophone playing inside the house.

We ring the doorbell, and Lulu Le Compte opens it. She is tall and elegant in a long stone-grey dress. Her salt and pepper hair is swept off her face and back into a chignon. Her lips are painted amaranth red. Her kiss on each cheek barely touches. She notices my pearls. Her eyes crinkle, as she leans forward to scrutinize them. Lifting the strand from my neck, she rolls a single pearl between her thumb and forefinger. She nods approval.

“Very nice, Sadie,” she says, and turns to Paul. “*Bienvenue.*”

Lulu ushers us into the house. Behind her stands Nicol, in a dark grey suit and bow tie, talking to someone I do not recognize. He raises his hand in a wave to us and smiles. Excusing himself, he

walks over to the door to greet us. He looks me up and down.

“Sadie darling, you look ravishing. I’m so glad you could make it.”

“But black is too severe for you,” says Lulu. “You are so young and lovely, you should wear light pastels.”

“You’re missing the point, Lulu. She looks sexy in black,” says Nicol.

“Really Nicol, you are too much.”

He winks at me.

“Eduardo is here,” says Paul. He lightly touches my elbow and guides me over to his friend.

One of the servants, dressed in a white shirt and trousers but no shoes, carries a large tray loaded with drinks. I ask the houseboy for a gin and tonic, and he hands me a tall glass filled with clinking ice cubes, topped with a twist of lemon. I turn my gaze to Paul’s friend. With his olive skin and dark eyes, he looks cool and crisp in his white suit and tie. Paul introduces us. His name is Eduardo Gonzales, and he is from Seville, Spain. He takes my hand and shakes it.

“Sadie! Good to meet you. Do you know where Paul and I first met? Nova Lisboa,” he says.

“I lived near there as a child.”

“Paul told me. Have you ever been back?” he asks.

“No time. Too much going on at home. Three children and a house to run, for starters.”

“That’s what servants are for, darling,” Paul says.

“I’m not ready to go back ... too many memories.”

“Paul told me about your father. I’m sorry,” he says.

Eduardo smiles at me and squeezes my shoulder. Paul and I move on and mingle. As we

move away, I detect the barest scent of coffee and brine. At dinner we meet again. I sit between Paul and Eduardo.

“Eduardo is such a mouthful, Sadie, call me Lalo. It’s the Spanish diminutive.”

“Lalo ... nice.”

Food is served and we eat. There are many courses: hors d’oeuvres, soup, fish, meat, dessert, and coffee. I eat and drink too much. My chest feels tight and constricted as I breathe rapidly. My heart pounds and I start to panic. Am I having a heart attack? My head reels.

I look sideways at Eduardo. He fiddles absentmindedly with his napkin. His eyes are distracted and distant, focused on some far-away spot. I move my hand toward the glass of water to take a drink, and my fingers shake. My palm is sweaty, and my dry tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. I cannot talk. Slowly, I lift the glass to my lips and drink. The cool water feels good. My tongue moves around my mouth. I realize this is not a heart attack ... whatever it is, it is not that. I breathe deeply, deliberately, and my pounding heart finally slows down. A warm feeling radiates up my abdomen from between my legs. I realize it’s about him, Lalo. A sublime conversation. A chemistry. I know, as certainly as he sits next to me, that I must have him.

I am steadier. I look at him more carefully this time. Does he feel it too? He gazes into the distance and moves his fork purposelessly around his plate. There is no food on it. He seems preoccupied with something else, troubled. He turns and looks at me intensely. I avert my gaze.

He shakes his head. “I’m sorry, Sadie,” he says, “I was lost for a minute.”

“Darling, do you feel alright? You look very pale,” Paul asks.

“I’m fine.”

I go to the bathroom and open the window. I splash water on my face and take long, deep breaths. My lipstick has worn off; I replace it and brush my hair before I go back.

Later we go outside. Some people dance, while others sit at the tables lit up by the lights in the trees and the lanterns around the garden. People chat and drink coffee. I sit with Paul and the Le Comptes. Lalo dances. He must have known some of the women from the Congo. I overhear their conversation. They speak in French. He throws his head back and laughs. How attractive he is. I do not like it. I recognize my own jealousy, and I am surprised. Lalo walks over to our table and extends a hand out to me.

“Will you dance, Sadie?”

I look at Paul.

“Go on, darling,” he says.

I take his hand, and we walk out onto the dance floor. My heart races, as it did at the dinner table. Lalo takes me in his arms, and we start to move to the music. I am a good dancer, but his intense presence reduces me to a nervous mass. I trip over my foot, and he catches me. I look up at him and shrug my shoulders.

“Sorry,” I say, “I seem to be all over the place.”

“That’s alright, it’s been a long evening. Would you like to sit this one out?”

“No,” I reply.

More than anything, I do not want to leave him nor for this moment with him to end. This time he holds me tightly to him. I do not make a mistake. We move together in silence. My cheek against his cheek, and I feel his breath slow and even on my neck, and the tympani of his heartbeat against my chest. When the music stops, we stay together. I do not think either one of us is ready to part from the other. Finally, I stand back, blush, and stammer “Thank you.” I make my way to the table where Paul and the Le Comptes sit.

“Everything all right?”

I nod my head and smile. Eduardo remains on the dance floor and looks back at me. I sit down. He moves forward and stops, then resumes the walk over to our table, grabs a spare chair, and sits down next to me. We are so close. The waiter comes by with a tray of liqueurs and I chose a brandy; Lalo chooses the same.

“Now ... tell us how you got out,” Lulu says.

“What?” Lalo says. He looks bewildered.

“How you left the Congo,” she says.

“Oh that,” he replies.

“Yes, that.”

Eduardo looks at Lulu, as if a spell has been broken; then he takes a quick look at me.

“Not much to tell. I was lucky, many were not.”

His departure began at Dilolo, close to the Angola border. His work with the railway took him there. News of the accelerating chaos came with convoy upon convoy of whites fleeing Stanleyville and Léopoldville after Lumumba’s arrest.

“I just joined the exodus. I heard a lot of stories, and I saw a lot of people come through in pretty bad shape. Most of them had lost everything ... left all their possessions behind. I crossed the border at Dilolo and took the train from Teixeira de Sousa to Lobito. The train was packed, and a young boy, whose parents had been killed, traveled with me. He died in my arms. Like I said, I’m one of the lucky ones. ”

“When did your wife and daughter go back to Spain?” Paul asks.

My fists clench. I know he is married, but I had not considered that when we were dancing nor earlier at the dinner table. I resent their intrusion. I should not care, but I do. Paul talked about his Argentinean wife, Rosario, and their daughter Fabiola, Fabi. Eduardo frowns at

the mention of their names.

“Six months ago, at the end of May. Just before independence. She saw no future after the Belgians had gone. So they left. They are in Seville.”

“Will you join them?” Lulu asks.

“I don’t think so. My life is here, in Africa.”

Paul nods.

“Don’t you miss them?” I ask.

“Rosario is very independent,” he says, a little too swiftly.

The party breaks up, and slowly the guests make their way to their cars. Paul brushes my hair out of my eyes when we are in the car. He kisses me, and the pressure of his lips on mine is crushing.

“So what did you think of Eduardo?” he asks.

“He was fine.”

“I thought I’d invite him to dinner.”

“Good idea.”

“You looked very pretty tonight, darling. All the boys were admiring you.”

“Don’t be silly, Paul.”

“I felt very lucky to have such a lovely woman at my side.”

“Let’s go home, darling,” I say.

Tennis

I take stock in front of the mirror. Dripping, I stand naked after my shower and scrutinize my body. Flat abdomen, despite three children. Breasts, small and a little droopy. Legs, slim and long. Face, pretty, my mother's face. What does Rosario look like? There, I've said it. I have given voice to what has been on my mind since the night of the party at the Belgian consulate. I am giddy with love, or is it lust? My stomach knots up, and I do not breathe at the thought of him. Would he want to be my lover? Would I want to be his? I know I would ... but I struggle with it.

Today I am going to play tennis at the club. Paul tells me that Lalo likes to play tennis. I can imagine him, his dark looks and tennis whites. I see his raised arm overhead, ready to smash the ball at his opponent. I tell Paul over breakfast that I am going to go to the club.

"I thought you hated the women there. You said they were gossipy bitches."

"Did I? I don't think so."

"You said it was boring," he says.

I shrug my shoulders.

"You are funny sometimes."

My shorts are in the bottom drawer of the dresser. I choose the shortest pair I own. I look for a top. Do I want sleeves or not? I decide against sleeves. I wear a white top with red piping around the neck. The neck is a little lower than I usually wear, but I don't care; I want to be noticed. I brush my hair back off my face and tie it with a red and white scarf that matches my top. I want him to look at me. I think I will die if he does not look at me.

I go downstairs and pick up my tennis racket in its press in the downstairs closet. Paul

gets ready to go back to work. I am scheduled to play at 4:30 p.m. Paul puts on his jacket and will drop me off on his way back to the office. He looks at me with his eyebrows raised and a question on his face.

“Sadie, do you think it’s wise to wear that top?” he asks.

I look at him. “That’s a funny question.”

“The neckline ... too low. It might get you all sorts of unwanted attention.”

I look in the hall mirror. I do not think it is too low. Sometimes Paul can be a real stick-in-the-mud. I also know that I am playing a dangerous game.

“I think it’s alright, darling. Don’t be so stuffy.”

“I don’t know,” he says and looks doubtful.

“Perfectly fine,” I say.

We leave out the front door. Paul carries his briefcase ready to go back to work. The nanny will be with the children, so I have just a little part of the afternoon to please myself, and I plan to do just that. When I arrive, I find my friends, and we go to our court. I notice that several of the men who were at the party at the Belgian Consulate are there. Eduardo is sitting at the bar. He must have already played. He waves. I leave my friends, and go over to him.

“I spoke to Paul today, and he has invited me to dinner. I am to dine with you tomorrow night.”

I am aware that I blush because my skin burns. I speak slowly and deliberately.

“Fine,” I say.

Eduardo smiles at me and I notice how white his teeth are. His smile is large and generous. If it had been any wider, it would have been a snarl. There is much of the wolf in him, I think.

“Until tomorrow evening, then,” I say.

I walk slowly back to my friends who have begun to warm up on the court. I feel his eyes watching me with every step I take. I enjoy his interest. Towards the end of our game, Paul arrives and watches the last thirty minutes of play.

“Darling, you were playing beautifully. I’ve never seen you play better.”

“That show was just for you, Paul,” I reply.

He smiles.

“By the way, Sadie, I’ve invited Eduardo for dinner tomorrow night.”

“That’s nice.”

Dinner

I plan dinner. Paul says Lalo has a new car which he wants to show us. It's a metallic blue 1959 Ford Fairlane. Cook knows we have a guest. Patricia will get the children off to bed. Drinks on the verandah and dinner at eight o'clock. I am ready.

I look at my wardrobe and try to decide what to wear. I want to look my best, but I don't want to come across as tarty. I decide on something simple, virginal: my white dress with the V-neck. I can wear the garnet pendant that my father gave me. It is small, not ostentatious, but it emphasizes my long neck. I want him to notice — Lalo.

He arrives at half-past seven. Paul returns late from work and is still in the shower when our guest arrives. Bernardo answers the door and brings Lalo out onto the verandah. I extend my hand as if to shake his. He ignores my hand and kisses each cheek very softly.

He says, "No formality between us. Would you like to see my new car?"

We walk out onto the street where Eduardo has parked.

"What do you think?" He looks at me.

"Very nice, convenient ..."

We return to the verandah and sit on the cane couch. Our thighs touch. I pause. I want to savor the moment. The cigarette box is on the table. I offer Eduardo one and take one out myself. He reaches for the lighter and shields the flame to keep it alight. When I bend forward to reach over, he lights my cigarette. Our fingers brush. On the other side of the road, I hear the waves crashing against the barriers. It is a dark night, and clouds obscure the moon. The palm trees on the beach cast a long shadow; they loom tall and dark, menacing. I smell frangipani on the night air; the breeze is heavy with its perfume. A small bat flies across the road from the surf toward

the house. It darts and swoops and soars.

“Tell me about your day,” Eduardo says.

“Tell me about yours.”

“You first, Sadie.”

I tell him about my life with Paul and the children. I listen to myself talk. How mundane it all sounds.

“Now I can look at my watch and know exactly where you are and what you are doing,” he says.

“Why would you want to do that?” I ask.

Before he replies, the French doors open, and Paul walks out to join us on the verandah.

“Is Sadie taking care of you, old man?” he asks.

“Time for a drink,” I say.

I ring the bell and Bernardo comes out onto the verandah.

“Bloody Marys?” I ask them.

They nod. I tell Bernardo in Portuguese to bring out three Bloody Marys for us with plenty of ice. Even though the sun has gone down, it is still warm. Paul does not like it when I speak Portuguese. He speaks badly and with a heavy English accent. He scowls after Bernardo.

“I suppose you understand that,” he says to Eduardo.

“Of course.”

“Did I tell you that Bernardo worked for Sadie’s father?”

“No. How nice to have part of a former life back,” Lalo says.

“It is,” I reply. “He watches out for me like he did when I was a child.”

We finish our drinks and go in to dinner. I sit at the end of the table, and Eduardo and

Paul sit on either side of me. We drink a lot of red wine, Periquita, chilled as Nicol Le Compte recommends and much too much. It is late as we sit around the dining room table. Bernardo has cleared everything away, and we drink coffee and brandy. We are alone. The staff has gone home for the night. They have to be off the Restinga by nine o'clock in time for the curfew. They return to the poor side of town on the outskirts of Lobito by the salt flats, to the Senzala.

"I hear you may go up country, Paul, to Nova Lisboa," Eduardo says.

"For about two weeks. There is some trouble with the payroll system that I need to straighten out."

"You didn't say, Paul. I wish they'd give you more notice," I say.

"They only confirmed it today."

I say, "One time, I'd like to go with you."

"Not this time, Sadie. Not while the children are so young."

"The other night, you said that's what servants are for."

"You know what I mean" he says.

"Not really, what exactly do you mean, Paul?"

I take a deep breath; I forget we have a visitor.

"I'm sorry, Eduardo. We should not have our little quarrel in front of our guest."

Lalo smiles. We are all three-sheets-to-the-wind. I suppose it does not matter so much. Nobody is sober.

"I promise there will be another time, darling," Paul says.

"For now, promise me that you'll drive up to the old house and take some photos?"

"Let's wait and see. If there's time."

Eduardo looks at me and shrugs his shoulders. I feel embarrassed that he has seen Paul

and I at loggerheads, witnessed our state of discontent. We argue a lot, or rather, we see things differently. I wish I could treasure every day. I did when my father lived, but not anymore.

I sigh. I thought Paul was like him because they physically resembled one another. That was naïve, and I do not think so any more. How I wish my father had lived! He was my protector, my safe place, my rock.

Eduardo and Paul move onto the verandah. They smoke cigars and talk about work. They have known each other quite a while, since we first came out to Africa. I join them and lean with my back against the railing. The night is dark, like a shroud, it envelops everything. How I wish I could walk up the front steps of the lodge and see my father inside, drinking a whisky and soda. I remember the house with the bougainvillea. I think of my father with Ana Amélia there. Her mad mother, Ana, spinning as the house burned. Fire cleansed and purged the tumbledown house and finally eliminated it, but it did not bring her daughter back. Just as nothing I could do would ever bring my father back. I wonder what remains of the hidden house.

“You’re deep in thought,” Paul says.

“In another life,” I reply.

“Don’t be maudlin, darling. Can I pour you another drink?”

“No. I’ve had enough.”

“My dear friends,” Eduardo says, “I must go home. Thank you for a great evening.”

He kisses my cheeks again, and I am reminded of the earlier kiss that evening when he arrived. Unfinished business.

“See you tomorrow old chap,” Paul says.

After Lalo has gone we sit together on the sofa for a while. Paul is quiet. I pat his hand, and he looks up at me.

“I sometimes wonder if I hold you back,” he says.

“Of course not, darling.”

Paul shakes his head.

“I feel very old.”

“No you’re not. Loads of life in you. Come on, let’s go to bed.”

I take his hand and stand up. I say the words with assurance, but it is an assurance that I do not feel.

Laundry

I am going to see Lalo. On an errand. The laundry service at the hotel is very slow. Paul offered the use of our washer lady, the *lavadeira*, to take care of his stuff. He asked me if I would mind collecting it from the hotel. The company driver will take me to the Hotel Terminus. It is a mundane, domestic thing.

“It’s only a small amount of stuff,” he says. “It’s a perishing nuisance for the man. He needs clean clothes, and he can’t get them back in time. Do you mind?”

I shake my head. We are spoiled. The staff changes our linens daily. The washerwoman takes our sheets and pillowcases over to the Atlantic to wash them with the other washerwomen on the street. She returns with the clean clothes and hangs them on the line in the back garden. When our laundry is dry, she brings it in to her small work shed and presses it. The iron is an old, heavy charcoal one. I love the smell and feel of the spotless clothes we wear every day. It is one of the delights of our life here. In the rainy season, it is a little harder. The servants have to hang the washing indoors some days. As the dead flying-ants pile up in the corners of the verandahs, so the house acquires a smell of mold. Bernardo takes our shoes out of the closets daily to set them in the sun because they become mildewed in the damp.

The car arrives, and I make my way down the driveway. Eduardo will have his laundry ready for me to bring back. Paul thought that it would only be this one time. I am happy to oblige. Of course I am. I will see him.

The driver opens the door for me and tips his hat. I get into the car. We drive down the tree-lined boulevard toward the Hotel Terminus. The hotel is so named because it is at the end of the Benguela Railway Line, near the main office where Paul works. The driver drops me off at

the entrance to the hotel. I ask the concierge to let Senhor Gonzales know that I am in the lobby. Eduardo descends just a few minutes later. He has a small bag with him.

“Sadie, I did not realize you were coming. I’m sorry ... I did not expect you.”

“I felt embarrassed coming down with a laundry bag, so I put all my stuff in this travel bag instead. It was very good of Paul. The laundry here takes forever, and I only have a few changes of clothing.”

I smile and take the bag.

“I would love to invite you for a coffee, but I am waiting for an old friend to meet me here,” he says.

I am not sure what to do.

“We met at the reception the other night and she is very late.”

I do not know what to say.

“Oh, let’s go and grab a coffee anyway,” he says. “I’ll tell them at the reception desk where to find me.”

I nod and we pass through the dim bar where the chairs are on the tables. We walk out to the patio and sit down. The waiter takes our orders and brings the coffees.

“When does Paul leave?” he asks.

“Sometime in the next few days, I believe.”

Lalo stands up and looks back through the bar area to the lobby.

“Sorry... I thought that was her, but it wasn’t.”

“I really should go,” I say.

Eduardo looks at his watch and nods. It is four o’clock.

We finish our coffee in silence.

“I would love to stay and talk, Sadie, but ...”

“Not a problem,” I say and shake my head.

“Thanks for doing this,” he says and stands up.

We shake hands.

“I’ll send it back with Bernardo tomorrow afternoon,” I say.

“What?” he asks.

“The laundry,” I reply.

“Oh, that.”

I walk through the lobby and run down the hotel steps to the waiting car.

That evening after dinner, I walk out to the laundry. I see Lalo’s travel bag in the corner. I walk over to it and unzip it. There are shirts, pants, underwear, and socks inside. I pull out an olive-colored shirt with a rough linen texture. I rub my hands over the coarse material. Before I replace it, I plunge my nose into the fabric and breathe deeply. It smells of the night we danced together, the smell of the sea. I bury my face in it, my shoulders heave, and I sob.

Guesthouse

The next morning I arise early. The disappointment of the day before kept me awake long after Paul fell asleep snoring at my side. I join Paul for breakfast. Cook brings in orange juice, eggs, toast and guava jelly. We drink coffee together.

“Nice to have your good company,” he says.

The sun strikes the window in the dining room, and the light illuminates a vase of orange and yellow flowers that Bernardo put on the table. I am hungry. I shovel scrambled eggs onto my fork and gulp them down.

“Sadie, I’ve been thinking.”

“Yes,” I say, and look up.

“Let’s offer Eduardo the guest house.”

Paul’s idea shocks me.

“What would people say?”

“Bugger people,” he says. “It’s the guest house, not our marital bed, Sadie.”

“I don’t know.”

“I’d be much happier if someone were here while I was gone.”

“It’s tough when the staff go home at curfew,” I say. “I hate the nights when you’re out of town.”

“Good. Then that’s settled.”

I worry about Eduardo coming to stay. Paul was right, he is a lady-killer.

Later, Bernardo and I go over to the guesthouse. It has not been occupied since we moved into the main house. There are dust covers over the furniture, and the windows are grimy.

“I think we are going to have to give it a jolly good clean,” I say.

Bernardo looks around and agrees.

“Miss Sadie,” he says, “do you think it is so good to have such a guest here?”

I look at him. He has known me for a long time, and he watches out for me.

“Why do you ask?”

“He is not good for your reputation,” he says. “There is gossip. They say he has many women.”

“He is a friend of Mr. Winter’s,” I reply.

“Husbands don’t always know.”

“It’s too late to change the arrangement,” I say and walk into the little bathroom.

Bernardo starts to pull the covers off the furniture. He continues to work. I leave him and return to the house. I have to get Paul ready for the trip up-country. His clothes hang neatly in the closet; I pull them out to give to the *lavadeira*. I lift one of Paul’s shirts to my face and sniff. It has a sweet, almost old-lady odor to it. It is not the smell of a young man; there is an inherent weariness to it. Lalo moves in two days later.

Lesson

On the first morning after Paul leaves, I do not see Eduardo. When I look out, his car is gone. I imagine he may have a meeting or some other early business appointment. The children and I eat a late breakfast. Bernardo takes Kit to class. Kit attends a Portuguese school, like I did. It's a little private school on the Restinga, *Instituto de Pedro Nunes*. I want him to be fluent. He has attended the school since he was six years of age. This is his third year. While we speak English at home, I think Kit is more comfortable in Portuguese. He berates his sisters for speaking such childish Portuguese. I tell Bernardo that I am going into town with the girls. He drives us in the Lancia when Paul is gone. I want to buy some material and then take them on to the dressmaker to make up shorts and tops for the hot weather. We look at the material and settle on some green fabric for Emmy and some red and blue cloth for Sarah. Our next stop is to the dressmaker. Emmy starts to fidget, and I know she is getting tired. She is only two. She starts to cry, and I pick her up.

“Home, Mummy, home,” she says.

Sarah starts to cry too. I am glad Kit is not with us. When the girls act up, he finds it tiresome and walks off.

“Shall we take the car back to the house?” I ask.

“ ‘Nardo, ‘Nardo,” Emmy says, and waves at Bernardo who is in the car.

Bernardo has been sitting in the car, waiting to take us home. He hears Emmy and runs to help me.

“Thank you, let's go home,” I say.

He gathers up our packages and stores them in the trunk. The girls and I clamber into the

back of the Lancia, and we leave. It is noon and time for the girls to eat. We drive through town; the car is hot and sticky. Emmy sits next to me and rests her head on my lap. She rolls the material of my blouse between her fingers. As we make our way back to the house, I see Lalo's Ford Fairlane. The opposing flow of traffic is at a standstill. A policeman in his tropical whites stands on a traffic island in the middle of the road and waves cars past the obstruction in the road, a large pothole. We pass the Ford, and inside I see Lalo and a dark haired woman next to him in animated conversation. She pats his shoulder as we move past them. He kisses her cheek. They seem to know each other very well. I turn away.

We arrive at the house sweaty and tired out. Patricia takes the girls upstairs to wash them and bring them down for lunch: salami and tomato sandwiches and milk. When I walk into the dining room, I see that Lalo's car is parked in front of the guesthouse. I send Bernardo over to invite him to join us. Bernardo looks at me and does not move.

"Yes," I say, "go."

He tilts his head in question.

"Go! Now."

He returns with Eduardo who looks tall and relaxed. His shirt is unbuttoned, and he does not wear a tie. I rise to meet them at the front door.

"Come and have lunch with us. Paul would be angry if I was not hospitable."

We walk into the house. Bernardo leaves to collect Kit from school. I tell cook that we are back and ready for lunch. The table is set in the dining room, and I put Emmy in her high chair. Sarah sits up at the table in her seat like the adults. She looks so small in the big chair.

"Does Bernardo always drive for you when Paul is gone?" Eduardo asks.

"He does, because I do not have a license," I say.

“Why don’t I teach you? It would give me a chance to repay you for your kindness.”

“It’s not necessary. I should think I would be quite worthless at driving. Not much with mechanical things,” I say.

I do not mention that as a little kid, my father sat me on his lap and showed me how to use the controls. I was able to drive around the compound in Maxie’s old truck. I raced along the roads through the property, but that was without any traffic and a long time ago.

“I am sure you could learn. Let me teach you. How independent you would be, not always relying on Bernardo. It would make a big difference. Come on give it a try.”

“Wouldn’t it be a terrible nuisance?”

“Not at all. Why don’t we go out this afternoon? What do you say?”

“Very well,” I reply.

When everyone is settled, I explain to Patricia that Eduardo is going to give me a driving lesson.

“How long do you think it will be, Madame?” she asks.

“An hour or so,” I reply.

Lalo and I go out to his car.

“We can drive up and down the road and see how you do. Nothing too difficult,” he says.

I get into the driver’s seat. My hands sweat as I put the key in the ignition. I fumble, and the key slips to the floor. I pick it up and wipe my hands dry on my shorts. I have watched Paul start the engine of the Lancia many times. I turn the key, the Ford lurches forward, and stalls. He places his hand over mine. He sits very close to me.

“Stop, Sadie,” he says, “you need to push the clutch in and slowly release the brake when you’re ready. Let’s switch sides, and I’ll show you what to do.”

Eduardo drives the car out of the driveway and onto the road. We set off in the direction of the lighthouse at the end of the Restinga. He pulls over to the side of the road in the shade of pine trees, turns the car engine off, and pulls the key out of the ignition. He then replaces the key and looks at me.

“Ready for your lesson?”

I nod. He puts the key into the ignition, simultaneously pushes the clutch in, and rests his right foot on the brake. All the while, narrating what he is doing. It looks so easy. After a while, I feel confident, and I get in on the driver’s side, ready to try. For the second time, I put the key in the ignition and turn it. This time I do not stall, and slowly, I release the clutch and creep forwards. I am so pleased that I take my hands off the wheel and clap in glee. The car stalls out, and I burst out laughing. Eduardo laughs too.

“You see,” he says, “you did it. It’s not so hard after all. It’s practice.”

He stops talking, and looks at me. “You are so pretty when you laugh and so serious the rest of the time. You need to laugh more often, Sadie.”

I look at him. For a moment I feel unbearably sad. I cannot remember the last time I threw my head back and laughed with abandon. He watches me without speaking.

“We saw you in town yesterday,” I say.

“When was that?” he asks.

“Around noon, downtown,” I reply.

“Was I alone?”

“You were with a woman with dark hair.”

“Ah, that was Diana, my cousin. She and her husband just arrived from the Congo.”

“You seemed to know each other quite well.”

“We were raised together as children.”

“Oh.”

The breeze off the ocean leaves my hair tousled. Before I can brush it off my face, he does so. He cups my chin in his hand, tilts my face up to his, and kisses my lips. We have crossed some sort of boundary, a line. If we continue, we will not stop. I kiss him back. He pulls me to him. I move myself over to his side of the front seat. His embrace is as strong as a bear hug. We kiss again. I close my eyes, and I think of nothing but the darkness that enfolds me. I feel his lips, his tongue, and his breath. I cannot stop, but he pulls away.

“Sadie, I’m so sorry. Please, please forgive me. It won’t happen again.”

I look at him straight on. “There is nothing to forgive,” I say. I straighten up, and Eduardo moves back to the passenger side of the front seat. I put the key into the ignition, push the clutch in, and start the engine. My hands are cool, and I do not sweat. I push down the accelerator and let the clutch out. The car purrs forward, and I start to drive. Eduardo clears his throat and looks straight ahead.

“Are you ready to change gear?”

I nod.

“Then you need to push the clutch in and shift up from first gear to second.”

I do as he tells me, and the car speeds up as we approach the Restinga lighthouse. My memories of driving Maxie’s truck are not so far from the surface as I thought. My first test approaches. I glide past an oncoming car and change into third gear. Eduardo looks at me with a frown on his face. I smile back at him.

“I think you have driven before,” he says. “You were stringing me along.”

“Not really. It was luck. Well maybe a little. My father used to allow me to drive an old

truck on some of the dirt roads on the property. It was a long time ago. I didn't think I would remember how."

"Let's go back," he says, "I think the lesson is over for today."

When we get back to the house, I drive the car up the driveway and park it alongside the guesthouse. I go into the house to check on the children and tell Patricia I am back. It has only been thirty minutes.

Invitation

I do not see Lalo for several days after the driving lesson. I busy myself with the household. The girls and I go to the dressmaker. The guesthouse light is rarely on when I glance over. He comes and goes; leaving early, returning very late. He spends most of his time away.

Nicol and Lulu Le Compte drop in. They want to check on me and invite me to a party at the Boîte, a restaurant that doubles as a club near the end of the Restinga.

“How are you doing with Paul out of town?” Nicol asks.

“I’m doing fine. I miss Paul, of course,” I say.

“It must be reassuring to have Eduardo in the guesthouse,” Lulu says.

“I hardly see him ... but it’s good to know that help is there if needed.”

“We wanted to invite you to a party at the Boîte,” Nicol says. “Eduardo will be there. We can pick you up, or you can ride with him. He said either way is fine. It’s your choice.”

The Le Comptes are always the last to leave a good party, and I prefer the idea of going with Eduardo. That way, I can return earlier if I want to. Most of all, I want the excuse to be alone with him, to patch up things. I ache for the man.

“Thanks, I’ll go with Eduardo,” I say.

“Very well, my dear, as you wish.”

That afternoon, Eduardo comes over to the house for the first time since we went driving together. As the children wake up from their siesta, I sit out on the upstairs verandah and read. I am not tired and do not lie down to rest. Bernardo calls me, and I go downstairs to the front hall. Eduardo stands there. His face is flushed a little, and his palm is sweaty when we shake hands. He does not look at me.

“How are you, Sadie?”

We both start to talk at the same time; then we stop, and laugh.

“I want to apologize for the other day,” he says.

“No need to apologize, I had quite forgotten.”

“I wanted to make peace, I feel badly. I understand the Le Comptes invited you to the party at the Boîte?”

“Yes.”

“Let me take you? It would give me a chance to make it up to you. Will you?”

“Of course.”

My heart races and I smile.

Boîte

I look good and I know it, as I enter the Boîte on Lalo's arm. I wear a simple ivory cotton dress. The neck is a high v shape with cup sleeves, a cinched waist, and a slightly flared skirt, simple but stylish. There are a lot of cars in the parking lot, so we must park some distance down the road. When we walk in, the place is full of people. I look around to see who I recognize. There are many faces that I do not. The Le Comptes are here, talking to some people I do not know. I lean in to Lalo to point out the Le Comptes, and I smell the essence of the man, salt, like the ocean. His presence next to me burns into my senses.

Lalo spots his cousin and waves. She's the woman with him the other day in the car. We walk over to Diana. Eduardo introduces me to them. The husband, Phil, is a lanky Englishman who wears a hearing aid. He is tall and stoops to hear the conversation. He rests his hand on Eduardo's shoulder, as if to be sure that he does not miss a word. Diana is a small dark woman; she smiles as she talks to Eduardo. I excuse myself.

I detach from the group and walk over to the Le Comptes. More people have arrived, and someone is setting up the record player. There is a bar in the corner. The music begins to play, and I tap my foot to the beat. One of Paul's colleagues at the CFB comes over, and we talk. He is Portuguese, and his name is Manuel something. I forget. He is a short man, but amusing to talk to. We move over to the bar, and he gets me a drink. I have a rum and coke, and he does the same.

"How is Paul doing up-country?"

"I haven't heard from him. I am sure he is doing fine. We all miss him, especially the girls," I say.

I feel a light touch on my shoulder.

“There you are, Sadie,” says Eduardo.

He smiles at Manuel. They know each other from the CFB. I finish my drink, and we go to the bar. I feel in a party mood. The alcohol helps. I want to dance. The record player is playing a song that I like. I hum a few bars under my breath.

“Do you want to dance?” Eduardo asks.

The Boîte has filled up. There is a line of people waiting to be served at the bar. A cloud of smoke hangs over the room, like a pall of dust. People smoke inside as well as outside on the patio. We move onto the dance floor. The number is slow. Other couples are draped over one another, but we stand apart. His proximity is unbearable. We move closer together. I know we will be scrutinized. The expatriate society of Lobito does not miss a beat. It is eleven o’clock.

“Sadie,” he says, “would you like to go home?”

“No. Let’s stay, I like the music.”

We drink and dance. At the bar to get refills, Nicol Le Compte stops and invites me to dance. I take his hand.

“Glad you could come this evening,” he says. “You keep yourself hidden away too much.”

“It’s hard to get Paul out of the house in the evenings; he’s such a home body.”

“Are you a home body too?” he asks.

“I used to love going to parties, but that was before children.”

“You must join us more often,” he says. “What a good dancer you are, Sadie.”

“I have a good partner.”

“You are too kind.”

We dance a few more and then join Lulu. The evening is hot and the room full of cigarette smoke. It irritates my breathing. I sip on my third or fourth drink. When I stand, I feel unsteady, and I have to sit back down. I look around for Lalo; he is dancing with someone I do not recognize. She is very pretty with golden-red hair and green eyes. Her eyes smile a lot. They move well together, and he twirls her around. The waiter asks me if I would like another drink. I order another one. I have lost count. The music finishes, and Lalo joins us. Nicol Le Compte stands up and brings over an extra chair. Lalo sits down. It is one o'clock in the morning. The waiter brings me a tall glass and asks Eduardo what he would like.

"I'll have a whisky on the rocks," he says.

He leans over to me and says, "I think I may have had a little too much to drink, I feel a little bit woozy."

"Maybe it's time to stop drinking?"

"You haven't stopped," he says. He rests his arm on top of my chair, behind my back. His fingers lightly stroke my skin. I look around the room. I do not think anyone has noticed. They are all too wasted. Even the Le Comptes are flushed and laughing at nothing in particular.

When I finish my drink, I go outside. The smoke is thick, and some of the guests appear to be very drunk. I get up to leave and still feel a little unsteady, but I am able to walk. I pass through the patio and down onto the beach. I notice a large man vomiting by the garbage cans at the side of the restaurant. It is a long time since a party has gotten as wild as this one. I make my way to the water's edge. The lights of the mainland are reflected on the other side of the Bay. The beam from the lighthouse sweeps across the water. The breeze is cool. It must be two o'clock in the morning. I think vaguely about returning home. I want to sober up a little before I return to the house. Patricia, the children's nanny, may still be about, and I would rather not

stagger in and face her. I think she talks to Paul.

I hear soft footsteps. The sand is so fine that it squeaks when it is compressed. I turn around to see who is coming. I recognize Lalo's outline. He walks steadily now. I see the orange flare from his cigarette. He approaches cautiously; I suppose he does not recognize me sitting in the sand.

"Is that you, Sadie?"

"Yes."

"Are you alright? We wondered where you had gone."

"I'm fine," I say, "it was so hot in there. I decided to come outside and cool off."

He takes another drag from his cigarette and squats down beside me.

"I'd kill for a cigarette," I say.

He pulls the pack out of his shirt pocket, flips open the lid, and half pulls out a cigarette for me. He sits down next to me and offers the opened pack. As he strikes a match, I cup my hand around the naked flame to prevent the breeze from extinguishing it. He shakes the match to kill the flame and puts the book back in his shirt pocket. We puff slowly on our cigarettes, looking straight ahead in silence. I am aware of every part of him next to me. He turns to face me.

"What shall we do about this thing between us?" he says, as he scrutinizes my face. "I think of you every second of the day. When I go to my next assignment, the thought of leaving you behind is unbearable. But you are another man's wife — Paul's wife — my good friend. And I am married too. My marriage has been difficult for a long time. That's why my wife and daughter left. We are Catholics, and we cannot divorce. So ... what are we to do?"

I start to say something, and I hesitate. I had thought that the attraction between us might

lead to an affair, and I wanted that. This is entirely different. I had not thought of anything more permanent.

“What are we going to do, Sadie?”

“I do not know,” I say.

He moves closer to me. Our sides touch. I do not move. He puts his arm around my shoulder. I smell the brine of his skin and feel the heat of his body so close to mine. Tears stream down my face. I cannot continue. I shake my head and place my hands over my eyes. I cannot stop shaking.

“I do not know, I do not know,” I cry out.

He places his arms around me, and pulls me toward him.

“I hate it that I made you sad.”

“You don’t make me sad, Lalo. You make me happy.”

We hold each other and rock back and forth. It is cool on the beach at three o’clock in the morning, as the noise from the party diminishes and people make their way home.

“Shall we head back?” he says.

“Yes,” I reply.

We walk back toward the Boîte from the beach. A few people still linger inside. We look for the Le Comptes to say good night. They stand at the bar.

“Join us for a final drink,” says Nicol.

I look at Lalo. “It’s quite late,” I say.

“Nonsense,” says Lulu, “it’s the weekend, plenty of time to rest up.”

“Oh, very well.”

The Le Comptes have walked to their car and left, and we walk down the road to the Fairlane. We weave along the sidewalk. I have drunk much more than I am used to. Lalo staggers a little and laughs. The parking lot by the Boîte and the road beyond are empty. We walk under a street lamp; the car is further down parked in darkness. He pulls me close to him.

“I don’t want to leave you tonight,” he says.

“We can drive a little,” I say.

He gets into the car on the driver’s side and puts the key into the ignition. I clamber over from the passenger’s seat and sit on his lap.

“You never did finish that driving lesson,” I say.

“Sure baby, sure,” he says.

He does not start the car, and I feel him place his arms around me. I shudder.

“Don’t stop,” I say.

He puts his hand under my dress and works it up to my waist. Then he puts his hands inside my panties and pulls them down. I moan.

“This is what you really want, isn’t it? And God help me, this is what I want too,” he says.

I turn on the ignition, push in the clutch, and the car lurches forward. I feel Eduardo tense as I begin to drive.

“One of us should be paying attention to the road,” he says.

“I am Lalo. Don’t stop.”

His hands explore. I creep down the road toward the lighthouse at the end of the spit. I smell the frangipani in the air. All the car windows are down as I loop around, and we go back toward the Boîte.

I feel his hands on my hips; I taste the salty sweat of him. I feel his penis hard against my back. I lift up a little, and he slips inside me. I feel the heat and fury of him as he moves inside me. At first slowly: testing, checking, sampling. As we begin to build a rhythm, I hit a stone in the road, and the car veers to the left. He stops and places his hands over mine on the steering column. I correct the car and we continue. The engine purrs.

“Slow down a little, darling,” he says.

I do not think we are going fast.

He forces himself back into me. I feel the penetration and move with him. I grind into his lap. I want to take him all in, every last part of him. My moans turn into a wail. The intense heat, as he rams into me, is ecstasy. Again, and again, and again. I move with him. I moan. I struggle. I feel the surge of pleasure building each time. My muscles tighten with each wave of contraction. I do not want him to stop. He pants, and I feel the sweat of him against my back. He thrusts harder and harder. I arch my back and shriek as I come.

The car pulls violently to the right. My attention is drawn back to the moment. It climbs over the curb and onto the sidewalk. The headlights shine on the little black and white paving stones that make up the sidewalk. The *cal* painted around the trunks of the jacaranda trees lights up. The car speeds over the sidewalk and onto the sand. I cannot take my foot off the accelerator. It feels heavy, paralyzed. The car flies towards the water. Lalo shouts something.

He pulls at the steering wheel, and we race toward a clump of palms. Every bone in my body is jarred by the impact. It knocks the breath out of me. I feel like a stunned animal unable to move. My foot lifts off. The palms fade into shadow as the yellow beam of the headlight dies. I cannot move. We both pant; I wait for my breath to slow. He reaches and opens the driver’s side door. We fall on top of one another onto the sand. I hear the waves smash onto the sand.

Something draws my attention to the edge of the water. I crawl toward it. We must have hit an animal, although I did not see anything. It takes a breath. I move forward and listen for another breath. I touch it. I feel the coarse curly texture of African hair. It is a person, not an animal — a human being. The horror begins to sink in. I touch his forehead, and my fingers are sticky. I bring them up to my nose and smell. It is blood, human blood.

Lalo sways as he walks over to me.

“Is he breathing?” he asks.

“I don’t think so,” I say.

I place my hand in front of his mouth and wait. No warmth of a breath comes. I start to shake. I sit down on the sand and retch. Lalo sits down next to me and puts his arms around me.

“There, there,” he says, “we’ll work this out.”

He walks over to the car and looks at it.

“I think I can get the car out of here.”

He gets into the driver’s seat and turns on the ignition. The engine starts. He steers the car across the sand, over the sidewalk, back onto the road.

“Come on, Sadie. There is nothing more we can do for him. He is just an old African. No one will care about this. It may be in the newspaper for a day or so, and that will be that. I’ll take the blame if it comes to that.”

“Is the car damaged?” I ask.

“Nothing that I can see. I need to rinse off the headlight and replace it. That should be easy.”

Any sign of the alcohol we drank is gone.

“I can park the car by the guest house so that the light is not visible from the road. I will

go down to the mechanic and get a new headlight tomorrow. There is not much to wash off the old one, I'll do that tonight.”

As we drive back to the house, we sit in silence. The single headlight barely illuminates the road. Lalo drives very slowly. I do not smell the frangipani. I do not smell anything. All my senses have shut down. I am numb.

Trouble

I wake up very late the next morning. I wonder where I am. Where is Lalo? I cannot remember the events of the night before. Slowly, along with memory and realization, comes terror. My heart races. I suffocate. Out of bed, I stumble onto the verandah and suck in deep breaths of air. I calm myself. From our bathroom, I look out of the window at the Ford Fairlane. It looks pristine. As if nothing ever happened. No trace left.

I hear someone coming up the stairs. It is Patricia.

“We let you sleep, Madame. I knew you must be tired from the party last night, so we did not disturb you. We got a telephone call from the office to tell us that Mr. Winter is returning from Nova Lisboa sometime today, but there has been a disturbance in the Senzala, and he may be delayed.”

“Thank you, Patricia,” I say.

Shit, shit, shit, I think. I need to regain my composure before he arrives.

“What sort of trouble in the Senzala?” I ask.

“I am not sure, Madame.”

I shower and dress. I pick up my bedraggled white dress and underwear from the floor, where I flung them down the night before. No sign of my panties. My turquoise sling-backs landed under the bed, and my pearls are draped over the chair in the corner. I pick them up, return them to my jewelry box, and put my shoes away in the closet. I hear a tap on the door. It is Bernardo. He comes with a breakfast tray. It is laden with orange juice, cereal, fruit, and coffee. A small cut glass vase with a single pale salmon hibiscus flower in it sits on the tray.

“How nice of you,” I say.

“You must eat, Miss Sadie,” he replies.

He places the tray out on the balcony on the cane table. I follow him through the French doors. The upstairs verandah faces the street, and I look out on the Atlantic. The surf slams onto the beach. Bernardo holds the cane chair out from the table for me to sit down. I close my eyes and feel the warmth of the sun on my back. I am distracted but only for an instant. I start to eat breakfast and think of Paul’s return. I shall have to stay calm.

There is a clatter on the stairs, and my two young daughters burst onto the verandah.

“Mummy, you slept for such a long time that we thought you were never going to wake up,” says Sarah.

Kit follows behind the girls.

“Good morning, darlings,” I say, and kiss each of their foreheads. “Did you have a lovely evening with Patricia while I was at the party?”

“We did, we did,” says Emmy.

“Patricia taught us how to play Twenty-one,” says Kit.

“It was too hard for Emmy though. She played Snap instead,” says Sarah.

“What time did you go to bed?”

“We stayed up late, Mum. We went to bed at ten o’clock,” says Kit, raising his eyebrows, as if to impress me.

“Well, that is quite late, isn’t it? I expect you feel quite grown up.”

Kit nods.

“Dad is coming home today,” he says.

The girls jump up and down, and Kit looks pleased.

“What would you like to do today? Shall we ride our bicycles down the Restinga and

swim in the pool? Would you like that?"

"Can we ask Mr. Gonzales, Mum, can we?" Sarah asks.

"I expect he is busy," I say.

"Please, please, please," she says.

Sarah goes to the guesthouse to ask Eduardo if he would like to join us and returns with a message. Would we like him to drive us down to the pool? I am still weary from the night before and accept his invitation. He emerges from the guesthouse looking casual and relaxed in a pair of shorts. He carries a rolled up towel under his arm.

"You're a light traveler," I say.

He smiles and asks if I am tired from the party? I reply that I am a little, but a swim in the pool should be very refreshing. I tell him that Paul will be back sometime today.

"You'll be glad to have him home, I'm sure," he says.

"Definitely," I reply, but I do not mean it.

We drive to the pool in the Ford. I walk around the front of the car to get in on the passenger side and look fleetingly at the headlights. They are identical. The impact of the previous night must have cracked the headlight, but nothing else was damaged. I sit next to Eduardo up front, and the children sit in the back. I have told Patricia to take the rest of the day off.

As we drive down the road toward Lobito town and the pool, I see black smoke in the distance. Eduardo looks in the same direction.

"Patricia said there has been some trouble in the Senzala," I say.

"Bernardo told me this morning. I wasn't able to find out what it was about. Only a matter of time before the trouble in the Congo spills over into Angola. I hope it doesn't amount

to anything.”

We arrive at the pool and the children run up the steps ahead of us. Emmy holds my hand, but Sarah and Kit race ahead. They are out of earshot.

“Are you alright?” Eduardo asks.

“No.”

“Be calm, my love,” he says.

“How can I?”

“It will be all right - you’ll see.”

“What about when you leave? What about then?” I ask.

“Come with me,” he says.

“I don’t know.”

The children walk through the gate and into the pool area. They come here often with Patricia. They smile at the lifeguard. I think his name is José. He is a young, stringy kid of maybe sixteen or seventeen. He wears dark glasses and a white hat. Emmy and Sarah stay in the shallow water. Kit dives in at the deep end.

Eduardo and I position ourselves so that we can watch the children, especially the girls who are novice swimmers. He leans over and touches my shoulder. I shudder at his touch because it is so unexpected.

“I fixed the headlight this morning,” he says, “not much damage.” He looks at me.

“Can you hold it together?” he asks.

“Paul will know something’s up. Any news of the African?”

“No. The body may have washed out to sea.”

“Would you protect me? I need to know,” I say.

“I don’t think anything will come of it. He is insignificant. He’s not white. What was he doing on the Restinga after curfew anyway?”

“But will you protect me?”

“Yes,” he says. “Will Paul guess?”

“No,” I say.

“Come away with me,” he says.

I shake my head. I cannot think of the future, but a future without him is impossible — especially after this.

Riots

When we return from the pool, Paul has not returned home. We go upstairs, and I help Emmy and Sarah bathe. I wash their hair and brush it. They put on their new outfits from the dressmaker. Emmy looks sweet in her green and white set, and the blue of Sarah's outfit matches her eyes: my two little towheads. They go out into the back garden to play on the swing. I join them. Does he watch us? Better that we are not together when Paul returns. I do not trust myself.

I sit on the swing with Emmy on my lap. We wait for Paul. I hold her to me with my hand around her tiny waist. She is like a baby doll. She still cuddles up and jumps on my lap whenever she can.

If I went away with Lalo, what would my life be like? There would be no question that the children would stay with Paul. I hold Emmy tightly to me and kiss her head.

Sarah stops swinging, and runs toward the house.

"He's back," she shouts. "Dad's back."

I put my feet to the ground and stop the swing. I get up with Emmy in my arms and turn around to see where Sarah is. Paul gets out of the car. He is with his colleague, Manuel. His face is sweating, and his clothes look disheveled. Manuel gets out of the driver's side and opens up the trunk. He waves to us. Paul reaches in for his suitcase.

"Hello, Sadie. Great party last night, don't you think?"

I nod.

"You must be tired today," I say.

Manuel laughs.

I walk forward to greet Paul. I am glad I have Emmy in my arms; it obviates the need to

hug him. I smile. I fear that with the first contact he will know. Paul reads me very well. We have been together for ten years. He looks weary. There are dark circles under his eyes, and he stoops over.

“Hello, darling, how was the trip?”

“Hot and irritating. I’m glad to be home,” he says, and extends his arms out to Sarah and Emmy. “Hello, you lot. Are you pleased to see me?”

“Daddy,” they cry in unison and run into his arms. He picks them up and swings them around.

Paul’s eyes turn to the guesthouse. I turn around to see what he is looking at. Lalo stands in the doorway and walks over. They shake hands.

“How are you? How was the trip?” Lalo asks.

“The trip was God-awful; it’s wonderful to be home. Sorry I missed a great party last night. Manuel gave me all the news.”

“Do you know what’s happening in the Senzala?” Lalo asks.

Paul tells us the protest is about a hit-and-run accident last night on the Restinga — an old African man. They found his body this morning.

“Wouldn’t take much for it to get out of hand. Things are very sensitive right now because of the Congo,” says Manuel.

Paul turns to me.

“Darling, Manuel has invited us to Jomba next weekend. Would you like to go? Jomba is quite something. You should see it before you leave, Eduardo. What do you say, Sadie?”

“We’d be delighted. *Obrigada* Manuel.”

“I’d love to see it,” says Lalo.

Manuel drives back toward Lobito. I hope we can steal some time together, Lalo and I. Bernardo carries Paul's suitcase into the house. Eduardo leaves. Paul and I enter the house. I follow him upstairs. I dread his touch. He puts the suitcase down and turns to me.

"I've longed to be home with you in my arms again."

He stretches out his arms, and I come to him. He smells my hair and holds me tightly.

"You feel wonderful. Do you suppose there might be time?"

I pull back and shake my head.

"Patricia has the day off. Later, maybe?" I say.

"How about something to tide me over?"

"No, Paul," I say.

"If I can't get it at home, don't blame me if I go looking," he says.

I shrug my shoulders.

"You're my wife, for Christ sake." He unzips his pants and pushes my head in to him. I pull away. He grabs my hair and pushes me back against him. He pries my jaw open like a dog. I brace myself and fight the desire to gag.

Deception

Kit studies for the entrance exam to go to school in England. When he is eleven, he will go back to boarding school. The English weights and measures system is not decimal, and he has to learn a lot of new material. While Portuguese spelling is phonetic, English is not, and so we have the added burden of language. We work for an hour after school each day so that when it is time, he will be ready. The math is difficult, and Paul will help today.

Kit and I sit on the sofa next to each other. Books are scattered on the table in front of us. Emmy and Sarah lie on their stomachs and color, while Patricia crochets in the corner. She makes a tablecloth for the dining room. Paul enters. He walks over to Patricia and looks at her work. She looks up at him and smiles.

“That’s very pretty,” he says.

Something about their interaction catches my attention. The way they look at each other. Is it their smiles or their ease with one another? I wonder. I am not sure. I try to remember what it is that stirs in my memories. Then I remember. The way Paul smiles at Patricia is the way he used to smile at me.

Patricia’s long black hair is tied back into a ponytail. A strand falls in front of her face. I do not think they realize that I am watching them. He leans forward and brushes the stray hair out of her eyes. She blushes and looks down. I return my attention to Kit. I shall need to be watchful. What is she up to? She is twenty-four, less than half Paul’s age. Paul waves his hand across my field of vision like a windshield wiper. I must be staring into space.

“Sadie, Sadie. Are you ready?”

“Sorry, I was far away.”

He picks up Kit's book and looks at it.

"What are you learning, old man?" he asks.

When I look at the textbook, it reads like gobbledygook. I do not understand the lesson.

Patricia looks over at us and smiles at me.

"This looks easy," he says.

"I'm surprised you're having difficulty with this, Sadie; it's quite elementary."

"That's women for you, Dad," laughs Kit.

"Even Patricia could do this stuff," says Paul.

She smiles across at him. I get up, rush across the room, and slam the door behind me.

That evening, as I get ready to go to bed, I lose control.

"How dare you show me up in front of the children and the hired help," I say, and fling Paul's briefcase at him.

Papers fall out and land on the floor and the bed.

"You can bloody well pick that up, woman," he says.

"The hell I will!"

Paul points at the papers on the floor.

"Don't imagine I haven't seen the little goo-goo looks that go between you and that Belgian woman. What do you think you're playing at? She's half your age," I say.

"She treats me with respect."

"Of course she does, she's after your money."

"Money? Money, Sadie? Money has nothing to do with it."

"Well, what is it then?"

“You’re not a proper wife to me, Sadie. You’re not kind.”

“So that’s what this is all about ... sex! Because I’m not your little slave, because I don’t take orders from you. You make me sick; you always want to do it. I suppose that’s why you have those filthy little magazines tucked away. You didn’t think I knew about that, did you?”

“I warned you, Sadie, if you won’t take care of my needs, I will look somewhere else.”

I pick up his shoes and hurl them at him.

Jomba

The troubles in the Senzala quieten down, and the rioting in the streets stops. People dare to come out of their shacks to clean up the mess, and slowly order returns to Lobito. Fifteen people died, Bernardo tells me. No whites are among the dead. The tense peace in the Senzala holds. Paul and I also have a fragile truce of our own.

Captain Belo, the chief of police for Lobito, bumps into Paul. The investigation into the death of the old African is going nowhere. They have no leads and no clues. Everybody guesses a white man is responsible. Who else would be out and about on the Restinga in the early hours of Saturday morning? Belo suspects someone from the party at the Boîte. It is no secret that it got out of hand. But there is no proof, and without proof there can be no arrest or trial. People on the Restinga are relieved. The last thing Lobito needs is a controversial trial, a cause for the locals to rally around. The Belgian Congo is still fresh on everyone's mind. Belo inquires at various garages in and around Lobito, but no heavily damaged vehicles have come in for repair. The investigation stalls.

One of the people killed in the Senzala riots is a cousin of Bernardo's. He tells me that his cousin supported his widowed mother and four siblings. Without him, they will be destitute. I ask Bernardo what they will do.

"They will go back to my aunt's village, where the family will help them," he says.

I remember Ana Amélia and her mother, Ana. She went back to her village, too. I think of my old home. I close my eyes and see my father sitting in his favorite chair, smoking a cigar, and talking to Maxie. He lives in memory. His image is never far from my thoughts.

The following weekend we pack up the cars and go to Jomba to join Paul's colleague,

Manuel. We travel to the mainland with several other families for a long weekend. Jomba looks out across Lobito Bay to the Restinga. It takes three hours to drive there. It is a complex of cottages built into the side of a cliff, linked together by shady trails, dotted with palms and crotons. Sleepy dun-colored dogs follow us when we move about the compound. They sneak around like the camp dogs at my father's home near Nova Lisboa.

The other families stay in the cottages, but we sleep on mattresses and hammocks in the main living area. We always do this. In the beginning, it was so that Emmy, when she was a new baby, would not disturb anyone. The area is not much more than a large, lean-to concrete structure with a wall and a roof. We go to sleep listening to the sound of the waves on the beach below. It is a place of magic. Our days at Jomba are a series of interludes: on the beach, siesta, walks, barbecues, and evenings under the stars.

In the evening, a cool breeze sweeps in from over Lobito Bay. The paraffin lamps, placed along the wall, illuminate the night with their dirty, yellow flames. The smoke rises from burning mosquito coils and blends in to the haze. A tinny mono record player plays LP's. Paul and I dance, and our outlines meld together in the shadows. The children lie on their mattresses and watch from the shadows.

On the second day, Paul and the children join the other families and walk along the crest of the hill to where the bay and Atlantic meet. The water surges and roils. I remain at the compound. In the few minutes of stolen time with Lalo the night before, we make plans to meet on the beach after everyone has set out. I tell Paul I have a migraine. There are labyrinths of protected coves and inlets along the coastline.

I descend the steep trail to the beach. The group walks along the cliffs, away from Jomba. Paul and the children are dark dots on the khaki landscape. I wind my way down toward our

meeting place. We planned to set out separately. I leave first, while Lalo finishes work in his cottage. I arrive at the rendezvous, and I have twenty minutes to wait. Inside the cavern, I sit on a rock in the center of a small tidal pool and paddle my feet in the water. I scoop up sand from the bottom with my toes. A crab scuttles along the bottom and buries itself. The walls of the chamber rise up to the roof, which is open to the sky.

There is time to think while I wait for Lalo. The secret we share taints and complicates our relationship, but I still long for him, more than ever. I brim with remorse at the death of the old African. We were reckless and irresponsible, but how could we have known that he was sleeping in the palm grove? Curfew was long past. How could we have known?

I hear a noise from above; a stone falls down from the roof. I wonder if someone is up there. It would be difficult to climb but not impossible. A dark shadow enters the periphery of my vision. As I turn, it disappears.

Lalo walks around the corner and into the cave. I forget everything. We run into each other's arms and hold one another for a long time. I feel the braced steel of his body against mine. We make love on the sand. It is a heaving event of frantic energy. We collapse and lie next to each other, limp and exhausted. We sleep. When I awaken, the sun is low on the horizon and shines through the entrance to the grotto. I hear a cascade of two or three stones fall from the overlook above and hit the side of the cave. I look up to see if I can spot anything. A shape flits across so fast, I cannot be sure if it is real or imagined. Lalo sleeps in my arms. I shake him.

"Get up my darling, we have to go."

His face shows confusion.

"We have to go," I say. "It's late."

We dally, reluctant to leave. I go first. I trudge through the sand and make my way back.

Lalo will return by another path to his bungalow. It is as if we never met.

Back at Jomba, Paul strides into the main area with Sarah and Emmy.

“Where is Kit?” I ask.

“Isn’t he here? I thought he would be with you by now,” Paul says and furrows his brow.

“Did he come back separately?” I ask.

“He came back earlier. He said his legs were tired.”

I wonder if Kit was the voyeur. We were close to the wall, so it would be unlikely that he could have seen anything from above. I wonder if he heard anything. Could he have heard anything over the pounding of the surf? I do not think so, but I cannot be sure.

“Where is he?” I ask Paul.

“I’ll go back and look for him. I’m sure he’s fine.”

Paul decides to find Eduardo so that they can look for Kit together. It is getting dark. I feel a knot in my stomach. Could Kit have run off after he saw us? Just as Paul and Eduardo prepare to leave, Kit walks in.

“Thank goodness you’re back. We were worried sick. Where were you?” I ask.

“I watched the ocean for a while, that’s all.”

I do not think he saw us. He looks tired and lies down on his mattress. Emmy and Sarah lie down next to him; Emmy strokes his hair and hums to herself. Kit rolls over and sleeps.

Our weekend is over. The families drive in a convoy, and we wind our way back along the mainland road, away from Jomba, toward Lobito. The day is muggy. The road from the mainland to the Restinga twists and turns. In some places it is bumpy and has large potholes. The

car is stifling. I close my eyes and doze. When I awake, we are skirting around the edge of the Senzala. I sweat, and my legs stick together in a pool of moisture. My neck and shoulders are stiff and ache. I see the rectangular mud shacks with thatch roofs. A beggar woman, dressed in bright tattered clothes with a dirty baby at her breast, sits on the side of the hot dry street with her hand extended, begging. I long for the cool, airy houses of the Restinga, their pastel stucco facades, terra cotta roofs, and gardens overflowing with palms, and hibiscus, and bougainvillea. I want to put my head on my cool pillow and rest. Paul's forehead is beaded with sweat as he concentrates on the road ahead.

A small gang of teenage boys, maybe five or six, runs out of a narrow alley and onto the road. We slow down and drive around them. They point at us and make loud comments. They are talking in Imbundu, and I do not understand what they are saying. I do not need to. Their faces scowl and their hips are pushed forwards aggressively. The sound of smashing glass causes me to look around. The windshield of the car behind us disintegrates.

Our motorcade breaks up as we accelerate in order to move away quickly. More boys run out of the alleyway and pelt the last car in our procession of five with stones. Paul swears under his breath. We reassemble on the side of the road once we have left the Senzala behind. Several cars in the motorcade are damaged. One has a shattered windshield, and others are pitted from the stoning. We go our separate ways home.

Chaos

We return home. The girls run to Patricia and go upstairs with her. Kit is very quiet and lingers, but he does not come to me. Did he see something? He looks down at the ground.

“Going up for a bath, Kit?” I ask.

He turns on his heel, walks away, and follows his sisters upstairs.

Paul calls him back and says, “Answer your mother, Kit.”

He turns around and looks at me. “I don’t need to talk to her.”

Paul strides forward and takes him by the hand. He marches him upstairs to his bedroom. I hear the thwack of Paul’s hand, but no noise from Kit. I wonder again if he saw anything. As I arrive on the landing, Paul closes the door. He motions silence. I nod, and we go downstairs together.

Paul looks at me with raised eyebrows.

“I wonder what the hell got into him?” he says.

“I expect he was tired and spoke without thinking,” I reply.

“Did anything happen?”

“Not that I can think of.”

“He’s such a good kid. He didn’t make a peep when I spanked him. Sure there’s nothing you can think of?”

I shake my head.

There are rumors of more fighting in the Senzala. Paul and Eduardo go into work together early the next day. Bernardo goes with them but returns an hour later. He comes into the

sitting room where I sit with the girls.

“It’s very bad, Miss Sadie. Burning, looting, armed gangs fighting the police. Much worse than before. I go back to collect Mr. Winter and Mr. Gonzales at noon. It’s not safe.”

“Have other people made it into work?” I ask.

“I don’t know.”

We may need to leave, if it deteriorates, I think. What if Angola turns into the Congo? Eduardo and Paul discussed the possibility. In the Congo, African servants turned on their masters, murdered them, and raped their wives, then slit their throats and left them bleeding to die. Babies grabbed by the heels, smashed against a wall, their skulls split open, and their brains splattered.

I go upstairs onto the verandah and look out in the direction of the Senzala. The turquoise sky is broken up by dark striations of black smoke. They riot because of the death of an old African man, killed in the wee hours on the Restinga. I am the cause of this. His name and family are unknown, I read in the paper. Maybe he came from out of town? Benguela or Catumbela? The horror of my culpability returns, despite my best effort at denial. I weep for the man. I weep for myself and for Lalo.

I shake and the sense of panic escalates. I will talk to Eduardo. I need to come forward. How can I live with this? I have to speak up. I cannot bear the guilt. I will come forward. Anything is better than living with this knowledge.

Eduardo and Paul return with Bernardo at one o’clock. Paul tells me there are barricades of burning tires blocking the road. They took a longer route home so that they could avoid the hot spots. There are checkpoints for traffic going onto the Restinga. Paul tells me the troubles were sparked by the hit-and-run death of the old man the night of the Boîte party. The nameless

man has become a rallying point. Lalo and Paul have been told to stay home.

That night we do not have electricity on the Restinga. There is talk of a black policeman having been murdered and his headless corpse dragged through the streets of the Senzala.

Eduardo and Paul talk late into the night. We sit out on the downstairs verandah. The drums of the Senzala beat incessantly. I stay up with them, and we drink too many drinks, and smoke too many cigarettes. Lalo does not look at me.

“What if the police lose control?” he asks.

“I don’t know,” Paul says.

If the violence does spill over and onto the Restinga, ships will set sail from the Port of Lobito, and there will be no way out for any of us. Several private yachts and motorboats are moored in the Bay. We decide to walk along the shoreline tomorrow and identify any old boats that might be useful. We are four adults with Patricia and three children. There is not much more that we can do while it is dark. Paul and I say good night to Eduardo. As a precaution, he will stay in the house with us. I lie in bed next to Paul. Ordinarily, the drums from the Senzala comfort me, and I fall asleep to their rhythm. Tonight it is different. The pulse is strident and filled with a harsh militancy. All of the spleen and rage of Africa seems to be invested in their rhythm.

Eventually, I fall asleep but I rest fitfully. I wake up during the night and look across at Paul’s alarm clock. It is one o’clock, and then two, and then three. When I finally fall into a deep, ephemeral sleep, it feels like five minutes before I awaken at eight o’clock in the morning. The spot on the bed next to me is empty. I feel the indentation where his body rested and it is cold. He has been gone for a while. I wonder what time he left. I get up groggily and put on my dressing gown. I go to look for Bernardo. He is serving breakfast to Patricia and the children. I

say good morning. Sarah and Emmy get up and run over to me.

“Daddy and Uncle Lalo have gone for a walk, Mummy. They told us to tell you so that you wouldn’t worry.”

“There’s nothing to worry about, my darlings,” I say. “We are safe here. We need to wait for them to come back and tell us what is going on. Everything will be all right.”

I do not believe what I am saying. The notion that the people of the Senzala could break through the barricades to the Restinga troubles me greatly. The talk of taking a boat out to the middle of Lobito Bay seems a long shot. I fear for my babies. What will happen to them?

Confession

Paul and Eduardo stay at the house for the next three days. The violence in the Senzala and the campaign for justice for the dead man escalate. Servants up and down the Restinga leave their white masters and return to the Senzala. There is talk of retribution against those servants who stay, traitors. Threats and intimidation pour out of the Senzala. Paul dismisses the house staff and orders them to return to their homes. Only Patricia remains. She is white.

“I cannot leave you, Miss Sadie,” says Bernardo.

“You must,” I say.

“How can I help, if I am not here?” he asks.

“I do not expect you to help. When this is finished, it will be safe for you to come back.”

Each night the drums thrash on.

We meet cautiously, when we can. I am finally calm, but it is Lalo who is unnerved.

“I worry about where this violence may go, Sadie,” he says. “We don’t have any way to get out.”

“If it hadn’t been the old man, it would have been something else,” I say, “Angola is changing.”

Captain Belo visits and brings news. We gather in the living room. He meets Lulu and Nicol Le Compte at the front door. They enter together.

“We came to look in on you,” says Nicol. “Patricia’s parents contacted us, and they are very anxious.”

“What dreadful times,” says Lulu as she pats Patricia’s shoulder. “Are you alright?”

Patricia nods.

“That’s the way,” Lulu says.

Belo does not give away much, but I think he is as worried about the situation as we are. He sits down and hurls back a scotch on the rocks in one gulp. We watch him drink in silence, leaning forwards, seated on the edge of our chairs.

“The Senzala violence is contained,” he says, “but it is still very dangerous. My informers have gone underground. It is difficult to get new information.”

“Will it spread?” Paul asks.

“No,” says Belo.

“Would things change if you made an arrest?” Eduardo asks.

“I think so ... then they would wait and see what we do next. People will go back to their regular lives for a while.”

Paul nods in agreement but Lalo looks pensive. I try to catch his eye but he avoids my gaze. I am desperate to communicate with him. I know what he thinks of doing. If he confesses to this, then the violence will stop. I cannot allow him to do it. I am the culprit even though he swore to protect me. Belo says the violence is going to stop, to slow down anyway. I cannot allow him to do this. I cannot. I will not.

Belo gets up to go; he visits several households each evening. He does not want panic on the Restinga among the white community. Where would we flee to? Eduardo gets up, and after he and Paul shake hands with Belo, he walks the policeman out to his car. I get up to go out with them. Eduardo places his hand on my forearm and shakes his head.

“I’ll go, Sadie,” he says.

I shake my head, “Please God, no.”

He is adamant. I try to go outside, but Lalo closes the door behind them.

Joy

After Lalo confesses, the violence in the Senzala stops. Servants return to the Restinga. The newspaper shows pictures of workers cleaning up mountains of burned tires. Guttled buildings and looted shops are boarded up or demolished. The smoky pall over the city disperses. People emerge from their houses, and produce stalls reappear in the street. Bernardo and the others return to us. The Senzala goes back to normal.

I am nauseous and dizzy and spend two days in bed. On the second day, I sit in a chair with the sun on my back and absorb the heat. I yearn to see Lalo. I send a note with Paul: "What do you need?" He returns with a written response in a sealed envelope, just one word on the piece of paper: "You".

I learn from Paul that the lawyers feel the trial will be quick, but they are unsure of the outcome. It is said that the violence in the Senzala got the attention of the Salazar regime in Portugal. There is talk of making an example of Eduardo. I am sick to my stomach. I realize he may go to jail for a long, long time, and all the while, I am the culprit, not he.

My malaise continues. Slowly, a possibility occurs to me that I had not considered. I calculate the last time that I had a period and realize that I am two weeks late. Surely not, I think. I cannot believe that I might be pregnant. When I was expecting my children, my breasts swelled, along with the rest of my body in anticipation of the little life that was growing inside me. This is a different, more modest occupancy. When I miss a second period, I have no more doubts. I make an appointment at the hospital to see Dr. Pinto-Coelho. He confirms my suspicion and offers his congratulations. Does Paul know, he asks? I shake my head.

I sit down with Paul for dinner. The children are in bed, and Patricia is reading to them.

He has been grumpy of late. I wonder about Paul and Patricia.

“There is something we need to discuss,” I say.

Paul looks up from his plate as he cuts a potato in half and says, “What’s that, Sadie?”

“Well ...”

“What?”

“I think I may be pregnant ... about two months on.”

Paul places his knife and fork down on the plate with great care and looks at me. His eyes narrow to a slit.

“Are you sure, darling?” he asks, his voice is quiet and even.

“Yes,” I say.

He slams his fist down on the table and looks at me for a long time.

“What the hell were you thinking? The last bloody thing we need right now is a new baby. Don’t you see what’s happening here? Going on all around you? Angola is going the way of the Congo. If we need to get out in a hurry, we’re fucked! How the hell do you think we are going to manage with a new baby?”

We sit in silence for a long time. I look down at the food on my plate I cannot eat.

“You have to get rid of it,” he says.

I throw my napkin down and run from the table. I go to the beach. I sit for a long time in the darkness. Tears pour down my face. I think of Lalo. What a mess. How am I going to explain an olive skinned baby?

Over the next few days, Paul brings up the subject of abortion several times. Each time I refuse. I wonder if he knows about us. He knows some of it, like when Eduardo was going to give himself up to Belo. I decide to visit. I don’t care what people think. Bernardo drives me in

Lalo's Ford. We race downtown. The jail is a large green building with bars in all the windows. Bernardo parks the car and waits outside for me. I carry a small bag of fruit. I do not know what else to bring. I enter the front hall and speak to the clerk behind the desk.

"I have some items for Sr. Eduardo Gonzales," I say.

The clerk tells me to sit and continues to write behind his desk. I wait on a wooden bench in the waiting room. He rings the bell, and a jailer enters.

"Go with him," he says to me, without looking up.

I follow the orderly down a long hallway. The building has a damp smell of mold. I sneeze. The ceilings are high, and the walls are a dreary dun color. At the end of the hallway is a row of doors, each with a lock and a number. These look more like private rooms in the Hotel Terminus than jail cells. The orderly pulls out a collection of keys from his trouser pocket, all hung on the same ring. He opens one of the doors.

"You may go in," he says. "Visits are fifteen minutes only. I'll be back."

I enter the room timidly. Lalo is seated on a chair by the barred window. He turns to see who has come to visit. His eyes shine when he sees me.

"You came," he says.

We cling to each other in a desperate embrace. I think, as we touch, that this may be the last time we see one another. I no longer know what the future holds. We sit down on the edge of his bed. I hand him the fruit.

"Does Paul know you came to see me?"

I shake my head.

"I had to come - especially after the note."

We hold hands and look at each other. I know we do not have time, and there is much I

have to tell him.

“We are going to have a child,” I say.

A tear forms in the corner of his eye.

“What beautiful news,” he says. “I can’t think of anything more wonderful. But the timing’s all wrong, Sadie. They will put me away for a long time to make an example of me. Does Paul know about us? Will you tell him the truth?”

I shake my head. “I don’t know. Tell me what to do.”

“Live your life and forget me.”

“What if I confess and tell the truth?”

He shakes his head and says, “Too late for that.”

“What then?” I ask.

I hear the jailer return down the corridor. His feet drag along in his flip-flops as he scuffs down the hallway. The keys clink in his hand. I cling to Eduardo. I do not want to leave him. He removes my hands from his shoulders.

“You need to go now. You need to live a good life. Leave Angola and be happy with our child. If I can join you, I will.”

“Will we see each other again?”

“I don’t know.”

I stand up from the bed as the orderly turns the key and enters the room. I walk over to him and do not look back at Lalo. What I have agreed to do is impossible. I walk through the door, and I do not look back. Bernardo drives me back to the house in silence.

Betrayal

I go up to my room. I sit on the bed and stare at the wall. The children are playing in the yard, and Paul has not returned home yet. I lie down and rest my head on the cool sheet. The room is warm, and I feel drowsy. The surf pounds interminably over the road. An idea comes to me as I close my eyes. Could Nicol Le Compte help? I decide to talk to Lulu. She has an open house most afternoons, and no one will miss me. I tell Bernardo that I will be back in an hour and a half. I shower and dress. My casual look belies my inner turmoil. Lulu is fond of Paul and Nicol Le Compte plays golf with him. I cannot be sure of their friendship to me.

I walk down the Restinga, past airy colonial houses of bright tropical colors: yellow, avocado green, ochre, pink with white trim. The gardens are filled with botanical life, date palms, hibiscus, and there are a few blue blossoms left on the jacaranda trees. I walk carefully making sure that my heels do not get stuck in between the black and white *calçadas* (mosaic black and white sidewalk stones). The gate to their house is open, and I walk up to the front door bell and ring it. Their maid, Delia, answers the door. She recognizes me and smiles.

“*A Senhora está em casa?*” I ask.

She nods and gestures me to enter. In the living room, Lulu sits in her favorite chair by the window with a lemonade in hand and her crochet in her lap. She looks up and beams a smile.

“Sadie, my dear, how lovely to see you,” she says. “I did not think anyone would come today.”

I nod my head but cannot speak. Tears start to form in my eyes and pool along the lower lids. I feel foolish in front of this elegant Belgian woman. She pats the pouffe at her feet.

“Sit down and tell me what is going on,” she says.

I sit at her feet. She strokes my hair and smiles at me.

“We are so fond of you, dear Sadie, Nicol and I. Please tell me what the problem is. Let me help.”

She leans forwards and embraces me then sits back in her chair and waits for me to begin. I tell her about Lalo.

“So there is an affair. There has been a lot of talk,” she says.

Her face is shut off, and I cannot read it. She blinks, and a look of slyness flits across her face.

Lulu scrutinizes me, “Is there nothing that will persuade you to stay with Paul?”

I shake my head and say, “Nothing.”

“There is something you should know. Eduardo is a philanderer. His wife and daughter went back to Spain for a reason. He is very handsome, no? He has had many lovers. In the beginning, it is very intense. Then he gets a pang of conscience and goes back to his wife. I first met Rosario and Lalo in the Belgian Congo. Rumors were rife. Did you know he is very religious? He loves women but is tortured by his Catholic faith. He goes on benders, and then he feels remorse. Rosario forgave him many times, but finally even she left him.”

Lulu looks at me straight on and says, “You are giving up everything and for what? How many times could you forgive him, Sadie? Even if he never had another affair, there is always his religion. Could you compete with that, do you think?”

I place my head in my hands and shake my head.

“Could Nicol help? I don’t know but I will talk to him. You would be wise not to visit Eduardo in jail again. Word already got back to me, and it’s been no time at all, has it?”

I nod in agreement and get up to go. She rises with me and we walk to the door. She

places her arm around my shoulder and pats me gently. Her hand is as cold as ice.

“Now I don’t want you to worry. It will be alright, you’ll see. I’ll talk to Nicol.”

I make my way home. I wonder if it would be possible to get Eduardo out of jail. Under house arrest it would be a lot easier to get him out of the country. If anyone can do it, Nicol Le Compte can. I will have to wait, but how do I stay calm?

Isolation

We dress to go to a party at the home of Paul's colleague, Manuel. Paul wants to make love before we go. I dare not refuse him. He has not mentioned the baby again, and there is no news of Lalo. Lulu and Nicol will be at the party tonight; maybe they will have answers.

We arrive late, and I apologize to Manuel as we walk through the door. His apartment is located on the second floor of an old colonial-style house. He is a bachelor, and his family lives in Portugal, somewhere in the north, Porto maybe. The place is decorated with memorabilia from his travels around Southern Africa. Wooden *Chokwe* masks glare down from the walls with slits for eyes, splintered teeth, and braided, hemp hair. Leopard-skin rugs cover the floors. The furniture is a mixture of bamboo and leather. A musty odor of mold and cigar smoke permeates the apartment. The servant hands me a drink. The food is laid out buffet-style on the dining room table: cold meats, vegetable dishes, salads, followed by a sherry trifle.

In the living room, the Le Comptes talk to Father Teodósio, the pastor of a little church on the poor side of Lobito. It has become Lobito's social protocol to greet the host first and then the Le Comptes. Paul takes my arm and steers me across the room. We walk over to Nicol and Lulu. The conversation quietens.

Lulu sees us and tugs at Nicol's sleeve. He looks in our direction and his brow furrows. He snatches another wine from the drink tray. We walk over to them. Paul shakes hands with Nicol and kisses Lulu on the cheek. Nicol leans forward and brushes his lips against my cheek. Lulu barely touches me.

"*Mes chères* ... so good to see you," she says.

Nicol shifts his body weight from one leg to the other. He does not make eye contact with

me. He eases Paul aside, they lower their heads, and Nicol talks to him in hushed tones. I know it has to be about Lalo. Nicol has more tact than to draw Paul aside and tell him that his wife is having an affair with his friend. It must have something to do with the case. Nicol looks anxious. I talk to Lulu, but she keeps the tone of our chat light and conversational.

I move to other friends, but they seem strangely quiet. They move away when it is polite to do so. I am being given the cold shoulder. What do they know? The room bristles with hostility. What has Lulu told them?

Seated in the corner of the room is a familiar person, an unexpected surprise. Maxie! My father's old partner from Huambo Province. I have not seen him for several years and did not expect him to be here tonight. He pats the cushion on the sofa next to him and invites me to sit down.

"So how is my other favorite white African?" he asks me in Portuguese.

I smile. We have been in Angola for a long time, he and I. This is our little joke. He is the other favorite white African.

"So-so," I say.

"Only 'so-so' my lamb? Not possible. What's going on?"

I shake my head, "Too complicated."

I want to change the subject.

"We went to Jomba," I say.

"Ah, Jomba ... the soothing balm for all ills."

He holds my hand. We sit like that for a long time, taking in the room and the party. We do not need words. Nicol and Paul frown, heads bent in discussion. I know it must be bad news. Lulu travels from group to group, mingling, like a humming bird in flight. Evanescent. As I look

around the room, I become aware of people watching us, taking sideways glances at Maxie and me, mostly the women, not the men. When I make eye contact and smile, they avert their gazes. I cannot wait any longer for news. I tell Maxie I'll be back. I walk over to Nicol and Paul and barge in to their conversation. I invite Nicol to dance. He is uneasy with my boldness. The song is slow and lascivious. *Bésame mucho*.

“How is it going, Nicol?” I ask. “Is there any prospect of release for Eduardo?”

His hold on me freezes and his body tenses. I have broken the rules.

“The case is very high profile, Sadie. Ordinarily we could have arranged a quiet departure for him. Belo says the government is going to make an example of him. The Senzala riots call for strong and immediate action if Angola is not to go the way of the Congo.”

“So there's nothing that can be done?”

“I fear not.”

I release myself from his hold and walk away. He is surprised. I no longer care. I find Paul sitting with Maxie. We move to the dining room and serve ourselves. I take very little. My stomach feels queasy. I spoon small helpings of boiled potatoes and green beans onto my plate; the thought of meat makes me bilious. We carry our food back to our seats. Maxie wears a hearing aid, and we talk loudly with him. He took quinine as a young man and lost his hearing.

“There seems to be a lot going on,” says Maxie. “What's happening with the trial of that Spaniard?”

“We were just talking about that,” says Paul.

“I hear they're going to make a showcase of him. Serves him right,” says Maxie.

“He is a good friend,” Paul replies.

“Do you know the man, Sadie?”

“A little. He works with Paul,” I say and sigh.

Rape

Outside, the wind has risen. The waves pound the beach. I look up and see a little fruit bat soaring and swooping over our heads. I turn to Paul. He looks at me with a dark scowl on his face.

“The baby isn’t yours,” I tell him.

“I know,” he says.

“Is that all?”

“I felt it. No one needed to tell me.”

“How?” I ask.

“Just the way things have been. Just the way you are with me these days. Oh God, Sadie!” he says.

His body shudders. I look at his face, but there are no tears.

“Why couldn’t you have kept it simple? We could have made it work.”

“What about Patricia? You’re not so damn innocent,” I say.

“Don’t you dare bring her into this! She’s the one who’s been there for the children while you go off alley catting.”

We get into the car. Paul pushes the keys into the ignition and flings the car into gear. We lurch forwards. I hold onto the side of the passenger door to steady myself. I do not dare speak. We hurtle down the Restinga on the Atlantic road toward our house. The trees whirl past in a blur of green. The wind pours in through the windows and streams through my hair. I look at Paul out of the corner of my eye. His face is tense, and his eyes are focused forward on the road. His mouth moves silently. Paul does not shout; that is not his way. He is quiet. When he speaks in a

low, deliberate tone, that is when he is at his most deadly. I fear him. We arrive at the house, Paul leaves the car without locking it, jumps up the few steps to the front door, hurls open the front door, and storms into the house. I sit in the car for a minute and wait. The prospect of facing him upstairs fills me with horror.

Paul lies on the bed under the mosquito net in his pajama bottoms. He smokes a cigarette. He does not look at me when I enter the room, but stares up at the ceiling and smokes. I remove my clothes slowly. I fold my dress and my petticoat and go into the bathroom in my underwear. I pull my dressing gown off the hook behind the door and wrap it around me. I pull my hair back into a ponytail. Then I wash my face and brush my teeth. The eyes in the mirror that stare back at me have dark circles under them. I try not to think of Paul; his fixed glare at the ceiling or the slow, deliberate inhalation and exhalation of cigarette smoke. It is a study of steely silence and control. I feel sick to my stomach, and my hand shakes when I put my brush down. I squeeze the toothpaste out of the tube; it goes onto my toothbrush and some spills onto the floor. I bend down with a tissue and pick it up. I am going as slowly as I can. I detest the idea of getting into bed with my husband.

I walk through the bathroom door and return to the bedroom. Paul lies on his side now, facing away from me. His bedside lamp is turned off, and he lies in bed so still ... so very still. I lift up the mosquito net and climb into bed. The room is dark when I douse the bedside lamp. I pull back the sheet on my side. Paul's body lies rigid, immobile, and I am careful not to touch any part of it with mine. He does not stir either. The silence between us is thick and black. I reach over to touch Paul and say his name in the darkness. He intercepts my move, pins my hand to the mattress, and rolls over to face me. He holds both my arms down on the pillow above my head. I struggle to release myself from his grip. He is so strong, and I am not able to wriggle out

of his grasp. He holds me down very tightly. He leans over me and starts to rub himself against me.

“Well, I guess since I am your husband, at least for now, I can take advantage of the situation,” he says.

I sense the snarl burning on his face. I imagine the resolute line of his upper lip. There is no escape for me this time. When all reason and words are gone, there remains the simple act of subjugation. This is not the first time that Paul has forced himself on me against my will.

He rubs his soft, greasy lips against mine and pushes his tongue hard into my mouth. I would like to bite it off, but instead I brace myself. He pushes his knee between my legs to spread them apart. I try to keep them together, but his strength is too great. He pries them apart and pins them down. I feel his erect penis against the inside of my thigh. He rubs himself up and down. He takes his time. He knows I am afraid. I am sure he can smell my fear. That is what he likes. When he enters me, he does so with extreme force, and I cry out in pain.

“Did that hurt darling? Who’s hurting now?” he says.

He enters me again with a mighty thrust, and I feel my body tearing inside. I know I must be bleeding because I feel the slickness between my legs. Like a maddened animal, he thrusts and thrusts, again and again. The pain is searing inside me as he rips into me. I do not cry out. I will not give him that satisfaction. I focus on Lalo and the prospect of escape... not this place, not this man, not this situation. Patricia is welcome to him, but I worry about the life inside me... so much violence. Paul comes in a mighty gasp, pulls himself off me, and pushes me aside like a dirty bath towel. I feel woozy and my head spins. I drag myself out of bed and stumble into the bathroom. My ripped nightgown hangs off my shoulders. I sink to the tile floor and collapse. The pool between my legs spreads. I cannot get up again. I close my eyes and rest my head on the

bathroom mat. It is soft and cradles my head. I stay for a while. I rest.

When I close my eyes, I see my father silhouetted in the doorway. He waves at me. I am so happy. I wonder why he is here, but I do not ask him. I fear he will go away and leave me alone again. I look at him, his dear face framed in the entrance to the bathroom. I know I am crying as I struggle to move toward him, but I cannot advance. His features blur and he is gone.

I am deluged with gorgeous colors: purple, green, brown, and ochre. I recognize the hidden house behind the bougainvillea vine. I smell gasoline. The flames start: orange, yellow, and red. My skin blisters and burns. The heat sears through me; there is no respite from this terrible combustion. I hear voices far off, but I do not recognize them. I do not care. I am floating far, far above them, and I cannot decipher what they say.

I open my eyes, and I am in a cool white room. I try to sit up, but I am too dizzy. The whirling loss of balance overcomes me. I cannot raise myself. I lie back down again and take refuge in the cool sheets. The next time I awaken, Paul and Patricia are seated in two tall wooden chairs next to my bed, and the children are seated all around me. They are silent. I am in an iron bedstead, and as I move, I hear the rusty bedsprings squeak. Emmy, who is sitting on the bed, giggles.

“Mummy, they squeak.”

I look at Paul who is seated next to Patricia.

“You two look like crowned heads of state,” I say and laugh idiotically.

Paul looks at me and frowns.

“What happened to me?” I ask.

“You started to bleed and collapsed in the bathroom. We called an ambulance, and they brought you here,” he says. He looks at me with an expression of inquiry. I imagine he is

thinking, did she know what happened, and if so, is she going to tell?

“How long have I been here?” I ask.

“Eight days,” he says.

He and Patricia exchange a glance. I know Lalo’s trial is slated to start any day.

“What day is it?” I ask.

“Wednesday,” says Patricia.

The trial was scheduled to begin two days ago. Surely one of the nurses will know what happened. Maybe Dr. Pinto-Coelho will come by later and tell me.

“When is Dr. Pinto-Coelho coming?” I ask.

“Later. He has been here every day. Thank goodness you have been in such good hands, Madame,” Patricia says.

She smiles at me. I notice that the left side of her body on the chair is in direct contact with Paul’s right side. Kit sits on the bed and holds my hand.

“Sadie, I think we had better take the children home. You need to rest,” Paul says.

He gets up from his chair and looks at Kit and the girls. Kit’s grip on my hand tightens. I look at him. “I want to talk to Mummy,” he tells Paul.

“Alright old man,” Paul says, “just a few though, OK? Mum is still recovering.”

Patricia files out with the girls, each one holds a hand. Paul pats their backs as he follows them.

“Not too long now, old man.”

Kit nods.

When they have left, he looks at me. The angle of his mouth droops down, his brow is knotted, and he does not make direct eye contact with me.

“Mum,” he says, “Dad and Patricia are very friendly when you are not in the house and I don’t like it.”

I wait for him to continue.

“I hate Patricia.”

I look at him carefully. I notice the scar over his left eyebrow where an Alsatian dog bit him. I am sorry that he has to grow up so quickly. He will need to be strong for Sarah and Emmy. I tell him so.

“You’re my brave and strong hero.”

He holds me tightly. I finally release his hands and tell him to join his father and sisters.

“Be strong for me.”

He turns around as he opens the door, looks back at me in the hospital bed, and nods. I wave from where I am, and he waves back at me.

I sleep restlessly after my family leaves. What does the staff make of my injuries? The hospital is half way down the Restinga, and as I go to sleep, I hear the rhythm of the drums from the Senzala. I do not know what it means.

Dr. Pinto-Coelho comes to see me the next morning. I feel much better. When he comes in, I ask what the drumming was about? The drums in the Senzala were to celebrate Lalo’s conviction. Justice for the old African who died on the Restinga. He was a runaway servant from Nova Lisboa on his way to his family in Moçâmedes. He spent the night on the Restinga on his way South. He has a sister, who works in one of the houses on the Restinga. He fell asleep on the beach, drunk on cheap beer. The family he worked for beat him, and the irony is that they were part African too.

I ask my nurse about the trial. She says that Lalo showed no emotion in the stand. There

were a lot of supporters for the old boy, and when the conviction came back, they cheered. The judge had to clear the courtroom, and Lalo was moved to a secret location for his own safety. I twist and turn in agony overnight. I want to tell my story, but there is no point any more. Lalo protects me, but he is an innocent man.

Dr. Pinto-Coelho comes by on his early morning rounds. I am glad to see him.

“How is our little mother?” he asks.

“Better,” I say.

He tells me to lift up my nightgown and listens to my stomach with his stethoscope.

“Do you want to hear the baby?” he asks.

I nod my head, and he places the earpieces into my ears. As my ear orients to the little sound, I register the tiny heartbeat.

“*Todo bem,*” he says.

“What happened between you and Paul that brought you to the hospital?” he asks.

I shake my head. I cannot tell.

“I can’t help you, Sadie, if you don’t tell me,” he says.

I do not reply, and he leaves the room.

Later, Paul visits without Patricia and the children.

“I cannot continue like this,” he says. “I want a divorce, and I want you to go back to England. I’ll pay you as long as you stay away from us.”

“What will you tell the children?”

“That you were very unhappy and had to get away for a while. Patricia can manage them. You’ve made me a laughing stock in Lobito. Everyone knows. Good riddance. The children don’t need a whore for a mother.”

He walks out of the hospital room. As he opens the door, he has an afterthought.

“Bernardo will pack up your things and bring them here. No need to come back to the house. I am going to book you a passage home on the Uíge. You will not see the children again. Is that clear?”

He stomps down the hallway, and his shoes click on the floor as he goes down the stone steps.

“What if I were to tell everyone how I wound up in here?” I shout after him.

I hear his footsteps pause, and his heel-strike gets louder as he returns to my room.

“You keep your trap shut! Open your mouth and the allowance ends – got it?”

He leaves the room with a snarl on his face. He and Patricia deserve each other.

Voyage

The pilot gets back into his tugboat and speeds away. I lean forward over the railing and watch him disappear. The ropes that pulled the *Uíge* out of the port of Lobito drop out of sight. I look at the houses on the Restinga. We pass the large all-white villa of the Le Comptes. I see the tip of our house facing the Atlantic side. We race past the cement factory and the lighthouse on the mainland. I lean on the railings and watch the sun go down in the West. I see Jomba one last time as the prow of the boat slices through the water and we head toward the Atlantic. I think I see someone waving goodbye on the bay side of the Restinga. I imagine that it is Kit and his sisters, but I know it is not. Neither Paul nor Patricia would allow such a thing. I stay on deck and look until the view is obliterated by the tropical darkness.

The ship slips out of Lobito Bay and heads into the South Atlantic with some colored streamers still clinging to the railings. I wish I had something to celebrate. Will Emmy and Sarah remember me? Aunt Tess has not replied to my letter. I feel queasy again. It was not like this with my other pregnancies. This baby's hold on life is fragile. He is all that is left of Lalo and me. He has to live.

Before I leave the hospital to return to England, Bernardo brings Kit one last time. We cling to each other and do not talk. He knows I am going away.

"When will you come back, Mummy?" he asks.

"I am not coming back," I say.

"I don't want to live with Patricia and Daddy. I want to be with you. Take me with you."

I ask Bernardo to take him home. There is nothing I can say or do that will make this any

easier. Bernardo picks him up at the waist and tucks him under his arm. Kit screams and wriggles. Bernardo does not let him go. Kit's face turns red in the struggle. Bernardo has tears in his eyes. They leave and walk down the hallway. I can hear Kit's screams for a long time afterwards, as they walk back to the house.

Maxie also comes to see me. He spoke to Paul and knows all about my fall from grace. The same evening, he returns and drives me to Father Teodósio's church. I will stay with him until it is time to catch the boat to England. It is as if I no longer exist, at least not in Lobito, or among the white population of the Restinga. I cannot bear for Kit to suffer any more. Each night, after work on the Restinga, Bernardo visits me.

"Miss Sadie, please let me bring Kit to see you one more time," he says.

I shake my head, "It is too difficult, Bernardo. He needs to forget me."

"A child cannot forget his mother, Miss Sadie."

"He has to. Help him, Bernardo."

"I cannot."

"Obey me in this matter," I say.

"Yes, Miss Sadie," he acquiesces.

The wind blows through my hair. As the sun descends below the horizon, a brief green flash of light races upwards. The lights of Lobito fade as we plow northward and the wind becomes chilled. We sail toward England and a future I can hardly imagine. I walk back down to my cabin.

Before I left, I sent one final note to Lalo telling him of the agreement between Paul and

me. I asked him to look for me when he got out of jail and gave him Tess's address. I do not know if the jailer that Maxie bribed for me was able to deliver it.

The flashing light of Lobito lighthouse fades into the black of the night. My old life is gone, and all I know is that my new life will be filled with uncertainty.

Despair

Several days out of Lobito, the seas become rough and the steely-grey waters froth and boil. I stay in my cabin. The storm makes my nausea worse, and when I stand up I feel dizzy. I do not vomit because I have not eaten. I just dry heave for two days. I am so weak that I cannot drink. I have to fend for myself. The ship's doctor is also laid up by the storm.

I run a warm bath to calm my stomach and ease my nausea. The bath fills with hot water. My hands and feet are cold and shaky. I cannot get warm. I lie down in the tub and the water seeps up and warms my chilled limbs. A stabbing pain in my abdomen makes me roll into a tight ball. I rock back and forth. The wave of agony continues. It takes my breath away. I wait, breathing slowly and shallowly. Little by little, the pain diminishes. I close my eyes and fall asleep in the tepid tub. When I awaken, the water is cold and my limbs numb. I move forward to lift my trunk out of the tub, and am immobilized by another wave of pain. I look down at the bath water; it is a deep red and two clots rest on the bottom. I scoop one up with the palms of my hands together and see the size of the clot. I close my eyes and shudder. Like an octopus, I send out another squirt of ink, except the ink is blood. I feel a contraction. As I pass out, I pull my arms and shoulders over the edge of the bathtub so that I do not drown. It is dark when I come to and my arms are numb. I wrap myself in my dressing gown and hold onto the furniture as I stumble into the bedroom. I lie down and descend into thankful oblivion.

BOOK III (1961-1980)

London

I do not expect to see her when the boat docks, but there she is - Aunt Tess. We hug. I take a step back and look at her. Her hair is peppered with white and her eyes are wrinkled at the corners. She smiles at me, and I notice the crosshatches around her lips. She looks more anxious than I remember.

“How are you, darling?” she asks.

“I’m glad to be back,” I say.

“Really?”

“Of course,” I answer. I do not mean it.

A porter follows us with my luggage as we make our way to Tess’s car. She sold her large home in the country and now lives in a smaller place in the western suburbs of London. She has never learned to drive. The driver sits in the front of the Bentley and we sit in the back and hold hands.

“Paul wrote me a long letter from Lobito explaining what went on. Really, Sadie, I can’t believe you were so foolish.”

I am not sure how much she knows. My eyes brim with tears. Tess leans forward with a handkerchief and dabs them away.

“Never mind all that,” she says. “What are you going to do?”

I shrug my shoulders, shake my head, and look out of the window.

“I don’t know,” I say.

“There’s something else, Sadie, and I don’t quite know how to go about this. So it’s best to go straight to the point.”

I turn to Tess and wait for her to continue.

“I have always stayed in touch with your mother,” she says. “I don’t suppose you knew that, did you?”

I shake my head.

“About a month ago, I received a letter from their solicitor to say that your mother, Hugh, and their son had been killed in a car crash in France ... I’m so sorry, Sadie.”

I should feel sad, I know that, but I do not. I cannot. My last memory of my mother is her long, slow wave from the driveway before she left my life forever. The idea of final, irrevocable separation is too huge to grasp. I have questions to ask her and things I want to tell her. Now I shall never have the chance. I look out of the window and take in the details of the English countryside, the lush grass, tall trees, and myriad flowers along the road. The leafy green landscape is so different from the dry yellow-brown of Africa.

Tess rubs my shoulder. I look at her and I do not know what to say. She looks close to tears herself. How do you behave when you hear that someone you barely knew died even when she was your own mother?

“Have you no plans at all about what to do?” she asks.

“None,” I say.

Tess pats my hand and outlines a possibility.

“How is your typing, Sadie?”

“Not bad.” I studied at a secretarial college before I married Paul. Even though I did not work during my marriage, I took care of all our correspondence. I think it will be easy to recoup

my skills.

“Why do you ask?”

Tess explains. She has a contact at the Foreign Office, a Senior Civil Servant, who has an opening for a secretary. If I like, she will call her friend and arrange an interview. I nod my head although I am apprehensive. The idea of work makes me nervous; I have been out of the workforce for a long time.

We arrive at the house. It is a three bedroom bungalow on a half acre. I get out of the car and the driver follows us up the path with my luggage. At the front door I turn around and look back at the garden. A bed of roses is in full bloom - orange, white, pink, and salmon. Their fragrance is sweet and heady. A flower basket hanging from the front porch brims with indigo lobelia, white alyssum, and rust-colored begonias. We enter. My bedroom is in the back of the house. I leave my luggage there and join Tess for tea in the living room.

“Now, you know you are welcome to stay as long you need to, Sadie.”

“Thanks, Aunt Tess.”

We sit down and sip our tea.

“I need to be independent. Would you call your friend at the Foreign Office? I must start work as soon as possible. If I get the job, that is.”

Tess taps her nose with her index finger. “Of course you’ll get the job, Sadie. It’s all been arranged.”

We laugh. She stands up to draw the curtains. While I help myself to a cucumber sandwich, I watch her as she walks over to the window. She walks slower and is more stooped over than I recall. I feel a surge of kindness for her. It cannot have been easy to be the guardian of her brother’s daughter. When she walks back to the sofa, I stand up and kiss her on the cheek.

“Thank you for coming to get me,” I say.

“I’m glad you’re here,” she replies. “I’ll call Hans tomorrow about that job. We’ve known each other for years. I met him through Kit. They went to school at Chalfont together.”

“He knew my father?”

“I don’t think they were especially good friends, but they rowed together.”

“Does he know anything about me?” I ask.

“Absolutely nothing, other than you’re my niece and I recommend you for the job.”

“Thank you for that, Aunt Tess.”

Hans

I knock on the door and a pleasant, resonant voice responds.

“Come in.”

I walk into the office of Sir Hans Hollander. He sits behind his desk, and as I enter the room he stands up. His office has a warm, musty smell like seasoned wood and tobacco. Sir Hans is a tall man - at least as tall as my father. His office is a landscape familiar to me of leathered books on bookshelves, a pair of worn oriental rugs, and old school photographs. He runs his hand through his wavy, white hair and motions for me to sit down. He wears a navy blue suit and tie.

“Mrs. Winter,” he says, “how nice to finally meet you. Tess said great things about you.”

I shake his extended hand and smile at him. His face is tanned and his brown eyes sparkle.

“I’m sure Tess has told you that this is just a formality,” he adds.

“Thank you for the opportunity,” I say.

“After we’ve finished, I’ll send you downstairs to Doris who will give you a speed test. Should be a piece of cake,” he says and laughs.

I hope so. I have practiced for the past ten days on Tess’s old Olivetti. He pauses for a minute and then begins to explain the job to me. I relax as he talks. I am familiar with all that he describes and my apprehension dissipates.

“What are the hours, Sir Hans?”

“Monday to Friday, nine to five, for the most part. Very occasionally we might need you after hours. Would that be a problem?”

I shake my head, “Not at all.”

I look out of the window at the grey, overcast sky. I hear the muffled chime of Big Ben in the distance and the whir of traffic on the street below. The rain outside drizzles in rivulets down the windowpane.

“Do you have any questions for me?” he asks.

I shake my head.

“You’ve explained everything very thoroughly, Sir Hans.”

“Just call me Hans,” he says, “and if I may, I will call you Sadie.”

As I stand up to leave the room, he walks over to the bookshelf and pulls down an old school photograph.

“Here’s a picture of your father, Sadie. We rowed together at Chalfont,” he says.

“Aunt Tess told me.”

He hands it to me and points, “Here we are. I’m in the second row. Can you spot your father?”

The black and white photograph is yellowed with age. Three men sit in the foreground on a bench and five men stand at their backs with a pair of crossed oars behind them. I look carefully at the Chalfont team and work my way along the top line of men. They are dressed in white shorts, T-shirts, and socks. I recognize my new boss standing at the end of the row on the right. The coxswain is seated on the bench in front. He is shorter than the rest of the team and goes barefooted. My father sits to his left. His image is blurred and out of focus as if he turned his head away at the last minute. He must have been a teenager at the time it was taken.

“There he is,” I say and point him out with my index finger. “You all look so young.”

“That was taken when we were in the sixth form at Chalfont. I suppose we must have

been about seventeen or so. Small world, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed," I say.

"Let's find Doris so that you can take that test. I'm sure you want to get it over with."

He leads me to the door, opens it, and we walk out together.

I start my new job the next week. Sir Hans is a considerate boss and we fall into a comfortable office routine together. I live with Tess and commute up to Whitehall each day. I return to the suburbs after nightfall in the yellowish glare of the sodium street lamps. Home and work mesh into an easy rhythm.

Six months into my job, Hans makes a suggestion as we take a break and I pour him a cup of coffee.

"How do you find the commute from the suburbs?" he asks. "Wouldn't it be easier if you lived up in town?"

It would be much easier, but I do not know how much it would cost to live in central London.

"It certainly would, but I'm not sure I can afford it," I say.

"You know that Muriel and I have a flat in town. Well, there's a place for rent in the same building. I know the owner. The rent will be minimal. He is going abroad and wants someone he can trust to house sit while he's gone. I thought of you. He'll be overseas for at least four years. What do you think?"

"It sounds wonderful. Would it be possible to have a look?"

We arrange to go together after work. I cannot believe my good fortune.

I move into my new apartment two weeks later. I am now ten minutes from the Foreign Office. The apartment building is on Half Moon Street, just off Picadilly. I walk to Whitehall each day through Green Park and St. James's Park. During the week, I go to work and explore the city in the evenings. At weekends I visit Tess or stay with friends in the country. It is a happiness of sorts. Most of my friends are new and do not know that I was married. I receive news of my children from Tess who hears from Paul periodically. She tells me that Paul is to marry Patricia and they will be posted to the Far East soon. The thought of Paul and Patricia revolts me. I hate the idea of Patricia raising my children. I think of Lalo. If only there had been a chance for us ... There is no news of him and the situation in Angola deteriorates. Portugal talks of sending troops. Outwardly I am calm, but inwardly I feel only numbness.

As Christmas approaches, I receive an invitation to a party. Hans and his wife Muriel open up their house once a year at Christmas and the entire department is invited to go. There is talk that the Minister will show up. It is Thursday and late night shopping. I have to find a dress to wear. I like Hans, but I have heard from other people in the office that his wife is difficult. She lives a reclusive life and rarely comes up to town from their country estate. I return home late laden with shopping bags. I open the main door and collect my mail from the mailbox. Upstairs I spread my purchases out on my bed. I spent too much, I know, but I am pleased with my outfit, a cream-colored dress and jacket with black trim.

I take the dress into the bathroom, hold it up against me, and inspect myself in the mirror. I am slimmer than I was in Africa. I shall wear my hair up in a chignon. I sigh and smile at my reflection.

A group of us from the office motor down to Hampshire for the Hollanders' Christmas party. Our driver, Gary, is a junior civil servant from an office on the floor below us. He must be in his late twenties. His hair is oily and his face is dotted with acne. When we arrive, Hans greets us at the front door and escorts us into the living room. The room is decorated with paper streamers and balloons. We are late and most of our colleagues have already arrived. The room hums with conversation. A large buffet table is set to one side of the room. There is a Christmas tree in the corner festooned with tinsel and ornaments. To one side of it sits an elderly woman in a wheelchair. She seems shrunken and frail. Hans takes me over to meet his wife, Muriel. Her face is wrinkled and has an irritated look. I cannot believe that they are married; she looks so much older than he.

“Muriel, my dear,” he says, “I would like you to meet my new secretary.”

She turns to face me and looks me up and down.

“So you're the latest one, are you? What's your name?” she asks.

“Sadie Winter.”

“Hans says he went to school with your father. I heard he was something of a lady's man, a bit of a lover-boy,” she says and snorts.

“Now, now, Muriel. Be nice. You didn't hear that from me,” says Hans.

“Yes, I did,” she says.

“Sadie, can I get you a drink or an hors d'oeuvre?” he asks and steers me away.

“I am so sorry,” he says. “Muriel can be a bit temperamental at times. She hates these parties.”

“Don't worry, Hans. We are a bit of an imposition, aren't we?”

“A very welcome one,” he says and squeezes my shoulder.

The Minister does not show up for the party. We eat and drink to excess. I stop after two champagnes, but some of our group are a little the worse for wear. We decide to check into a local hotel for the night rather than drive back to London. As we gather at the door to say our farewells, Hans walks over to me with my coat and helps me into it.

“Are you going to be alright, Sadie? Some of this lot are quite drunk,” he says.

“We have rooms booked at the hotel, so we won’t be driving back to London tonight.”

“Good, Sadie. I’m glad you’ll be safe.”

On Monday morning as I leave my apartment building, I feel a tap on my shoulder. It is Hans.

“Can I walk with you?” he asks.

“Sure.”

He says, “Thank you for coming to the party. I’m sorry Muriel was so difficult.”

“It wasn’t a problem.”

“I feel badly about what she said.”

“Why?” I ask.

“Because it was unkind and unnecessary. She can be quite difficult ...”

We walk on.

“Sadie, I need your help if you’re agreeable.”

“What can I do?”

“I need you to do some typing for me, if you are willing,” he says.

“You’ve been very good to me. If I can help you, I’d be glad to. What sort of work is it?”

“I need someone I can trust to type up a manuscript.”

I am surprised; I did not know that Hans was a writer.

“I write poetry and I need someone to type up my poems to put in a collection.”

“Will the collection be published?” I ask.

“I don’t know,” he says.

We walk on in silence through Green Park and Saint James’s Park. The trees are denuded of leaves exposing the smooth, bare branches like long bones picked clean by winter. The flower beds are empty and covered with a layer of rotting leaves.

“I would be honored to help you put together your collection of poems,” I say.

“Thank you, Sadie. I’m the lucky one.”

We start to meet after work. Sometimes I collect work from Hans’s flat, and other times we go out for a coffee and I return the typed poems. I understand why he is cautious about who he trusts with his work. His poems are love poems; tender, sweet poems about a very young girl who dies. A love lost. I know they cannot be about his wife, Muriel. I wonder if they are about someone he loved long ago, or a product of his imagination. I do not ask.

When the manuscript is complete, we celebrate. By this time I am familiar with Hans’s schedule and have become a regular visitor to his flat. He stays up in London during the week and returns to his estate in the country on the weekends. He decides to stay in London for the weekend so that we can go out for dinner.

“I told Muriel that my Minister needs me over the weekend during some closed door meetings with his Belgian counterpart.”

“That wasn’t quite true, Hans.”

“I know, I know, but I wanted to say thank you properly. I couldn’t have entrusted this to anyone else. Can you imagine the furor at work if they found out that Sir Hans Hollander writes love poetry and even worse, it’s not about his wife.”

“It’s beautiful work, Hans.”

“Thank you my dear. Now ... I thought we would go to a nice little Greek place in Soho that I know. What do you say?”

“Hans, you don’t have to. I was well paid for the work that I did.”

“But I want to ... You’ve become a friend and a confidante, Sadie.”

We go to Soho for dinner to celebrate the manuscript’s completion. The restaurant is small and intimate. We sit in a dark corner of the place and when we leave I am a little tipsy. We enter the apartment building on Half Moon Street and get into the elevator. Hans presses the button for the fifth floor where his apartment is. We ascend and pass the third floor where I live. He takes me by the hand as we walk from the elevator to his front door. I do not go home that night.

Letters

The beginning of my affair with Hans marks the beginning of a long and stable time in my life. It is 1975, and I cannot believe we have been together for over thirteen years. I am not in love, but I do love him. For the first time in many years, I feel safe. With Hans's help, I have bought my apartment from the original owner who remained abroad. He is a busy man and I do not see him all the time. Since his retirement from the Foreign Office, we no longer see each other every day at work. We get together two or three times a week. He continues to spend the weekends in the country with Muriel, for the most part. I do not feel jealous and make no demands on him. I have friends in London now and spend time with them too. Our relationship is an easy one without the ties of domesticity nor the prospect of disappointment. When he is in town, all I need to do is climb the two floors to his apartment and knock on the door. It works for us.

One Wednesday evening, Tess calls me and invites me to visit for the weekend. I have other plans, but I hear anxiety in her voice and decide to cancel them. When I arrive at the bungalow, she is in the garden bent over picking a bunch of roses.

"The garden looks wonderful," I say, "what a great job you do."

"I'm afraid I can't take the credit. It's become too much for me, so I have a gardener who does all the donkey work."

She straightens up and I am surprised by her appearance. She moves slowly and her breathing is shallow and rapid.

"Aunt Tess," I say, "you sound awfully breathless. Is something the matter?"

"Let's go inside and have a drink," she says.

We sit in her living room and she pours us each a gin and tonic. She hands me mine and sits down on the sofa next to me. I notice that her ankles are swollen.

“I have a heart condition, Sadie. It’s not curable but if I am careful, it can be managed.”

I am shocked at the prospect that she might not always be with me. I had not considered losing Tess.

“I’m sorry I haven’t been to see you more often lately. Is there anything I can do?” I ask.

“Nothing right now, Sadie. Don’t look so glum. I haven’t kicked the bucket yet.”

We laugh and down our drinks.

As I leave to return to London, Tess remembers something and hands me a letter. It is addressed to me, but in handwriting I do not recognize.

“It went to the old house, but the owners were nice enough to send it on. Looks intriguing. Who do you know in Brazil, Sadie?”

“I don’t know, darling,” I say. “I’ll call you when I get home and tell you. Got to go or I’ll miss the train.”

She stands on the front porch and waves goodbye as I race down the garden path to catch my train. I am reminded of the last time I saw my mother. I recall her long, slow wave before she got into the car and drove off down the driveway. I look back and blow Tess a kiss as I turn around the corner.

On the train, I look at the envelope before I open it. The postmark is dated July 25, 1975. The writing is in a beautiful copperplate style. It looks more like calligraphy. I open the envelope and inside is one page. The letter is written on onionskin paper. I look for the signature and

cannot believe what I see. It is from Lalo. He gives an address in São Paulo, Brazil, and my hands shake and tears stream down my cheeks as I read:

“My Dear Sadie,” it says. “I hope this letter finds you, because it is the only address that I have for you. I have started to write to you many times over the last few months since I arrived in Brazil, but have been unable to find the right words. I finally realized there is no easy way to make contact after so many years. I have been in jail for a very long time and have changed a great deal. Can you believe that I am fifty one? I do not know that you would recognize me.

If you want to write to me, you can always reach me at the above address. I hope you will.

Lalo.”

I put the letter back in its envelope and replace it in my bag. I thump my fist on the empty seat next to me. Why did it have to come now? My life has changed too. I cannot absorb that Lalo, who I thought was dead, is alive and living in Brazil. Does he want me to join him after all this time? I cannot leave the life I have built for myself since I left Angola. I also have Hans - faithful, steady Hans.

When I call Tess that evening, I tell her that the letter was from an old school friend in Angola who now lives in Brazil. I am not sure she believes me. I do not tell Hans about the letter. I agonize over whether to respond or not. In the end I decide to write to Lalo if only to tell him of the loss of our child. I admit I am curious to find out more about his life.

I receive his response quickly, within three weeks. His letter is dated October 17, 1975.

“My Dear Sadie,

I was so pleased to hear from you. I cannot believe we have made contact! The news of our child distressed me very much. I always imagined that we had a son. I wish I could have been there for you. I shall always regret that I was not.

After we parted, I was sent to another prison. It was somewhere up on the plateau, I think. I was placed in solitary confinement for a long time - several years. It was a fearful place. I never saw my guards. I just saw the flash of a black hand as they retrieved my slop bucket or pushed food through the small opening in my door. I heard the gunshot of executions in the courtyard below most nights. Some of the victims were children. I could tell by their high pitched cries.

Things did improve for me after the first few years and I had a roommate, Roberto. He was a UNITA fighter who had been captured in Huambo. When he arrived, he was nearly dead. I nursed him back to health with the help of one of the prison guards, Bonifacio, who was more decent than the rest. I finally had someone to talk to. We were also allowed visits from a Catholic priest, Father Teodósio, whom I had met in Lobito. I believe you knew him. He told me that you had stayed with him until you left Lobito on the Uíge. I understand you worked hard to get me out of prison. You spoke to Nicol Le Compte and asked for his assistance. Thank you for that. I know that he was not much help and I am to blame for that, Sadie, not you. Lulu hated me and would do anything to prevent it. At one time, Lulu and I had an affair in the Belgian Congo when I was based there. I am not proud of that.

When Portugal pulled out of Angola after the revolution at home, Father Teodósio saw an opportunity and helped me leave the country. My saddest regret is that I could not take my friend, Roberto, with me. I arrived here at the end of 1974, and I am slowly getting used to this

different way of life. I see from the news that Angola will get her independence from Portugal next month on November 11, 1975. I cannot imagine it will bring peace, but I hope and pray that it does.

Lalo.”

I do not reply to this second letter of Lalo’s. I do not see the point. Any feelings I had for him were exhausted long ago. He is very far away and I am happy with my life in London and my relationship with Hans. I did not wait for Lalo. It was too much to ask. I need to end this connection with the past.

Lalo writes one final time to tell me that he will be passing through London on his way to Spain to visit his daughter. He suggests that we meet. I cannot see him and I write to tell him that it is not a good idea.

In the New Year, I get a call from Tess’s solicitor to tell me she is in hospital. I rush to her side. She has an oxygen mask over her face and looks small and vulnerable in her hospital bed. Her doctor speaks to me and tells me that her condition is serious. I stay in her hospital room with her. She sleeps a great deal. On the fourth day of her admission, she becomes confused. I ask her if she would like a drink and she turns to me with a puzzled look on her face.

“I’m terribly sorry, but I don’t believe we have met. What is your name?”

“Don’t be silly, Tess, it’s me, Sadie,” I say.

“Sadie, that’s a pretty name,” she says and sinks back into her pillow and closes her eyes.

The doctors think that she may have had a small stroke. I sit close to her and hold her hand and read to her.

On the fifth day of her admission in the early hours of the morning, she slips into a coma and passes away quietly the next morning without recovering consciousness. I am devastated.

Tess has always been there for me. I cannot imagine continuing without her.

Loss

It is after Tess is buried that I begin to feel the full extent of my loss. She is the closest relative that I am in contact with and she is gone. I cannot imagine how I can continue. I also worry about Hans. While he is very active, he is in his eighties. I lose myself in my work at the Foreign Office. I am now in charge of all the secretaries.

One morning on my walk to work, I stop to look at the spring flowers in Green Park. The tulips and daffodils have started to bloom and the trees are tinged with the pale green of springtime. I am early for work and sit down on a park bench for a few minutes. There are a few people in the park. A young couple walks towards me. They have their arms around each other. I watch them as they approach. They look to be in their early twenties and their faces shine with happiness. They must be in love. The girl looks Asian, maybe from Malaysia or Indonesia. She has long waist-length black hair and dark eyes. She is very pretty. The young man has dirty blond cropped hair. He is tall and stands very upright with almost a military bearing. He is talking to the girl. I watch them in fascination; they are oblivious to me. Briefly, the young man looks at me seated on the bench. I suppose he sees a graying, middle-aged woman who was pretty once but faded now. He does not recognize me, but I recognize him. It is my son Kit. He seems happy and as much as I would like to talk to him, I do not. After they pass, I get up and go on to work.

Since his retirement from the Foreign Office, Hans has published his original collection of poems and another since. He is due to do a poetry reading at Foyle's Bookshop on Charing Cross Road at seven o'clock. I decide to go and listen to him. He has a beautiful voice and the

readings are a joy for him. At the Foreign Office, he was unable to pursue his poetry, but since his retirement, he has stayed busy and his first collection was very successful.

I arrive just before seven and take a seat at the back. Hans sees me and comes over.

“How about dinner after this?” he asks.

“Do you have the time?”

“I always have the time for you, Sadie.”

The reading room fills up, and Hans ascends the podium to the applause of the audience. His voice mesmerizes me as he reads his beloved poems. At the end he stands up and bows to the applause. He looks over towards me and smiles. I move toward the platform to congratulate him. There is a collective gasp from the audience as Hans clutches his chest and searches for me in the crowd with a panicked look on his face.

“Oh God, no!” I scream and race forward to him.

He collapses to the ground and the Foyles’ staff ask people to stand back to give him room to breathe. They call 999 for an ambulance. A man in the audience comes forward and leans over Hans who does not seem to be breathing.

“I’m a doctor. Can anyone here help me give CPR until the ambulance gets here?”

I step forward. He coaches me and together we work on Hans. The doctor compresses his chest and I give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Each time we stop so that the doctor can check for a pulse, I watch Hans’s chest to see if he is breathing. I do not think he is.

The ambulance siren sounds in the distance and gets closer. The team arrives and we step aside. The room empties of people as they work on Hans. They continue for a long time, but they are not able to get a pulse back. I stand next to the doctor and watch.

“Did you know him?” the doctor asks.

“I worked with him,” I say. “Is he going to survive?”

“It doesn’t look good,” he replies.

Hans is pronounced dead at the scene; his body is covered and placed on a gurney.

“Would you like to go for a coffee? You look pretty shaken up.”

“I think I need something stronger.”

We go to a bar near Leicester Square.

As our department at the Foreign Office prepares for Hans’s funeral, I get a visit from his nephew. Hans and Muriel had no children.

“I have been asked by my aunt to come and see you,” he explains. “She has asked that you not attend Sir Hans’s funeral. She is aware that you were his mistress for many years. Your presence is not wanted.”

I sit at home and drink a stiff whiskey. It is time for Hans’s funeral service to begin in Hampshire. In a way, I am glad that I am not there. It would be too difficult and I have no desire to see his widow. We were together for a long time. At work, I notice that some of the younger staff members stop talking when I approach. While Hans and I were circumspect, it was an open secret that we were together.

Country

The advertisement in the paper is small, but it is exactly what I have been looking for. “Wanted: matron of a small, all-boys boarding school. Please send a resume with your letter of inquiry.” I want to sell and leave London. I long to be in the country and far away from the grey gloom of London and my job at the Foreign Office. Since Hans’s death, it has become untenable and it is time to retire.

I contact the school and go for an interview. Three weeks later, I get a letter offering me the job. I pack up my apartment and put it on the market. I sell most of my furniture and take the train to Malvern, Worcestershire. I take very few vestiges of my former life with me. Among my belongings is the old tin chocolate box in which I keep the treasures of my childhood.

As the train speeds away from Paddington toward the West Country I feel a surge of relief. I am a survivor. I have coped with the deaths of Tess and Hans in rapid succession and with the humiliation of all the whispers at the Foreign Office. I have even dealt with the grief of my lost children; after not seeing my son for many years, I spot him in London but he no longer recognizes me.

Surprise Meeting

It is 1980 and I am fifty five years old. I make a final check in the boys' dormitory before I leave for the day. I smooth the counterpane on the bed by the door as I take a last look and go down the stairs to the front hall. I sign out for the weekend. This place has been my home for four years: The Boys College. I prefer the slower rhythm of the country. The green surroundings of the Worcestershire countryside are soft after the harsh, drab gray of London.

I look at the hall clock as I put on my raincoat. My packed suitcase is just inside the office door. The train journey to London takes three and a half hours. I am going to visit a retired friend in Paddington. She expects me at five o'clock. I shall catch the 1:30 pm train.

Whenever I go up to London, I wonder if I will see my children. In all these years, they have never tried to contact me. Paul knew where I was. He paid me to stay away. I wonder if he told them I had died. I mourn the loss of my family every single day. I missed Kit, Sarah, and Emmy's childhood. I did not see them marry and have children. I surely am a grandmother by now, but to whom? Could I have passed one of my grandchildren in the street and not recognized them as Kit failed to recognize me that day in spring of 1976 in the park?

I have not heard any more from Lalo. I cannot imagine what he looks like in his late fifties. He still inhabits my dreams. But he is young in those dreams, and I am middle aged. I try to put the past behind me, but Angola haunts me more and more these days. Months will go by and then I wake up after dreaming my recurrent dream. I see my father, still alive, and I am so happy. I weep because I imagined in my dream-state that he had died. As I transit from slumber to waking, I taste his saltiness only to realize that I am tasting my own tears.

I look in on the school secretary.

“I’m leaving, Miss Price.”

“Thank you, Matron. Have a wonderful weekend.”

The path to the station is short and I walk briskly. The rails whine as the engine rumbles into the station. I climb on board and find a non-smoking compartment. The carriage is cool, so I wrap my raincoat around me and pull my felt hat down on my head. I open up the newspaper and start to read. My eyes migrate toward a small article about Angola. A rebel mission from UNITA will be in London for two days for discussions at Number 10. There is a blurry picture of the head of delegation. There is something about the way he stands. I fold the paper and lay it across my lap. I am tired. I close my eyes. I will not miss my destination because Paddington is the last stop.

Purple: before I am aware of where I am, I have a notion of it. I do not have a name for this place. I have dreamed of it so many times before. I no longer see my father there; rather I have a feeling that he is watching behind the scenes. I am disappointed. I am aware that something is changing as the train slows. The brakes wheeze into action, squeeze the rails, and we stop.

“All change, all change, Paddington Station.”

I rise, gather my paper, do up the buttons of my raincoat, and grab my case. I step down onto the platform with my ticket in hand ready to present it to the inspector. I see my friend, Harriet Clarke, waiting for me at the end of the platform. She waves frantically. I pass through the barrier and we embrace.

“Pub?” she says.

“Pub,” I agree.

We drive out to Buckinghamshire for an early dinner. We dine at a pub in Great

Missenden called the Tinkers Arms. We always come here when I visit. Tomorrow calls for a different routine. We shop separately and meet at five o'clock sharp for cocktails at the Savoy followed by a show. I do not ask Harriet what play we are going to see. It will be a surprise this time. We eat and drive back to Harriet's home.

On Saturday morning, I leave the apartment early and go to Harrods. As I descend the down escalator to leave the building with several shopping bags under my arm, I see someone familiar. What grabs my attention I am not sure, but I look twice, and then again a third time. He passes by me on the ascending escalator as I go down. He looks straight ahead, and we do not make eye contact. I race to the ascending escalator. I think it could be Lalo. Could it really be him after all these years?

He has short, white hair and a well-trimmed beard. What throws me is that he wears a cassock and a dog collar. Is it possible? Is it really him? I have to be sure. He moves down the hallway toward the men's clothing department. He walks at a fast clip. I speed up. I cannot lose him. He stops and picks out a soft, yellow cashmere scarf off a rack. After hurrying, we are almost level. I stand immediately behind him and cannot move. I detect a faint odor - pleasant, salty. I move my hand inexorably forward to pat him on the shoulder. He jumps as I touch him and turns around quickly. He looks at me without recognition, but I recognize him. It is his aroma. It has to be him. I take in his facial features. It takes a minute to process the changes of time; he is older.

"Lalo?" I say. "Is it really you?"

A look of shock passes over his face.

"Sadie? After all these years?"

My eyes mist, and I nod slowly. We embrace. We stand that way for a very long time.

There are no words. We separate and clasp one another's hands. I shake my head.

He laughs, "There have been some changes," he says. As he points at his clothes, shrugs his shoulders, and raises his eyebrows.

"A priest?" I ask.

"Yes," he says, "... it brings me peace."

Lalo and I take the elevator to the fourth floor restaurant and sit down for afternoon tea. It is half-past four in the afternoon, and I know that I am not going to meet Harriet on time. I excuse myself, call the Savoy, and leave her a message. I do not want to miss the performance, but this meeting is too important.

We face one another; Lalo reaches for my hands and clasps them in his. The expression on his face is radiant. I sob as we touch. He pats my hand.

"What happened to you?" I ask.

"Do you have all day?"

"If necessary," I reply.

He tells me of his time in Brazil working with Leonardo Boff, one of the leaders of the Liberation Theology Movement. His old friend, António, re-entered his life, and he is now working for Jonas Savimbi and UNITA, one of the three rebel factions embroiled in the civil war in Angola. António sought Lalo out with the idea of recruiting him.

"António told me that they wanted a priest to come with them to the States because Americans are so religious. It would make a good impression on the politicians to see a priest on board," he laughs.

I remember his laugh and how he threw his head back with complete abandon.

"The first time I went with António and Savimbi to Washington to solicit funds for

UNITA was five years ago. My hope was always to help make peace in Angola, but in that, I have failed.”

Lalo leans forward on the table, his head in his hands, and looks at me very intently.

“I’m so sorry I could not have been there for you, Sadie, when you lost the child.”

I shake my head and I cannot speak.

It is dark outside and I hope Harriet got my message. We have talked for a long time and it is time to leave.

“Are you free tomorrow?” he asks. “We are staying at the Dorchester. We have one more day. Then we leave for Lisbon and Africa. Would you come? We could meet at the coffee shop.”

I promise to meet him the next day at ten o’clock in the morning.

Full Circle

Harriet drops me off the next morning at the Dorchester. It is a quarter to ten, and I am fifteen minutes early. Feeling very out of place, I walk around the hotel lobby and then make my way to the coffee shop. There is a table by the window and I sit down. The pale English winter sun shines through and warms me up. I watch the other customers drink coffee and read the papers. At ten o'clock precisely, Lalo arrives with his Angolan friend, António. He is a tall man - over 6 feet. He has clipped hair, is neatly groomed, and wears a suit. He looks like a prosperous businessman. He walks with a silver-tipped cane and a slight limp. He has sunglasses on. When Lalo points me out, he walks over. I stand up and we shake hands. He has a strong grasp, pumps my hand, and does not let go of it. He smiles a wide, white smile.

"Lalo has told me much about you over the years," he says. "I am so pleased to finally meet you, Sadie."

He takes off his sunglasses, and I notice his green eyes: the color of moss.

The waitress comes over to our table. She wears a black dress with a white apron and cap. I see that her name is Phoebe. She brings us a menu and sets the table. We decide on coffee and pastries. António and Lalo have an official function to go to at one o'clock in the afternoon, so we have a little time.

"Lalo tells me you spent some time in Huambo Province as a child?"

I nod, and tell him about my father and his partner, Maxie. He listens.

"I come from there too," he says.

The sun has warmed up our corner of the coffee shop. António removes his suit jacket and tie. He undoes the top button of his shirt, and I see that he is wearing a medallion on a chain

around his neck.

“You notice my pendant,” he says. “It is the only thing I have that belonged to my father. I never knew his name.” He undoes the chain and hands it to me.

“Is something the matter, Sadie? You look very pale.”

I shake my head. I cannot believe what I hold in my hand. I look at the back of the Saint Christopher. The inscription reads M.C.C. If there were any doubt at all, it is gone. The initials stand for Malcolm Christopher Carnegie: my father.

“You say this belonged to your father?” I ask.

“Yes,” he replies. “I never knew him. My grandmother refused to talk about him. Her daughter, my mother, died giving birth to me. The only time she ever mentioned my father was when she gave me this.”

“Do you know anything about your father?” I ask.

“Nothing,” he replies, “except that he was a white man. We moved far away from Huambo Province and then the wars came. I never had a chance to find out.”

I do not know what to say. The idea is too large to grasp. António sees my confusion.

“What, Sadie?” he asks.

I turn to him, and then to Lalo. My voice trembles.

“They called my father Kit Carnegie, but his full name was Malcolm Christopher Carnegie - M.C.C. He had an Angolan mistress whose name was Ana Amélia. Her mother, Ana, was our housekeeper. Ana Amélia died giving birth to a child. After the death of her daughter, Ana left our house in the middle of the night. I always thought the child had died too.”

This time, it is António who is at a loss for words. He looks at me and a tear winds down his cheek. Now he too understands. “So ...” he starts.

“No,” I interrupt, “there’s more. My father had a Saint Christopher medallion that he always wore and it disappeared when Ana Amélia died - this medallion.”

We sit together - brother and sister - side by side. There are no more words. There is no need for that. I want to take something away from this place and this day. So, after they both leave, I pick up António’s discarded paper napkin and write on it:

“On February 22nd, 1980, at the Dorchester Hotel, London, I met my brother for the first time... António Cristóvão Sambúlu. We are two parts of the same puzzle; our father was an Englishman and Africa our mother.”

When I return from London, I pull my trunk out from under the bed and unlock it. At the very bottom is an old tin chocolate box. I take it out and open it. Inside are three shriveled acorns, a tattered duck feather, a piece of bark, a picture of my mother, and a brown and white stone from my father’s grave. Out of my purse, I take the folded napkin and open it up. I spread it out on top of the bed and read the words. There is a small brown stain of coffee in the middle, and I run my fingertips over it. Then I place it in the box with my other treasures and close the lid.

VITA

The author was born in London, England and grew up in Angola and Iran. She attended Malvern Girls' College and in 1976 obtained her Bachelor's degree in Physical Therapy from the Middlesex Hospital School of Physiotherapy in London, England. Since 1977 she has lived in Australia and the United States. In 2003 she began the University of New Orleans Low Residency Program in Creative Writing and intends to graduate in December 2011.



(Personal photograph of the author)